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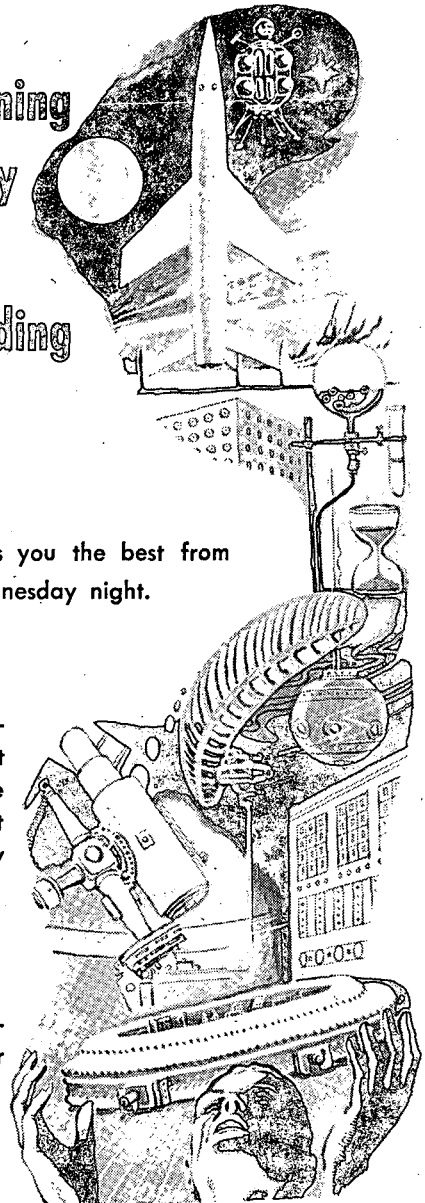

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OF TWO MINDS

MOST of the greatest contributions and biggest messes have been made by two kinds of brains—the devious and the literal. Those of us who fall between these extremes are generally awed by the first and dismayed by the second.

When I was writing fact-detective cases, I was impressed by the beautifully elaborate plans of a Chicago man who murdered his wife with all the brilliance of a chess master. But then I discovered why the police prefer ingenious crimes; with so many threads to hold, the complex criminal is bound to tangle himself up quickly.

The devious slayer was caught in less than a day!

But deviousness is almost always a joy to watch. Not long ago, *The New Yorker* ran a piece by a writer who lacked repartee and thus was reduced to prepartee—setting up his gags in advance. Living in the country, where power and phone lines topple in every storm, he saw a great possibility:

If the power lines went down *and* the telephone wires didn't *and* he made a call to a neighbor *and* the wife answered *instead of* the husband, he'd have a perfect setup.

That was a lot to ask, but it happened. He grabbed the phone, called, the wife answered, and he crowed, "Where was Moses when the light went out?" Mrs. Moses said, "Down in the cellar. He thought it was the fuse." The writer said, "Oh," and made some small talk about the storm, and disappointedly hung up.

Naturally, he had to tell somebody, so he explained the joke to his wife, who listened stonily. "Well, it was a funny idea, wasn't it?" he demanded peevishly. "Funny," she said. "Don't make me laugh."

She, incidentally, once reported that a friend of hers "goes to church religiously."

With a wife like that, I suppose a man has no recourse but Erector Set thinking. Unfortunately, he just proves the cops are right—the more complicated reasoning gets, the more likely it is to fall apart.

Yet there's no doubt that we need devious minds. During WW II, some genius hired science fiction writers to think up outlandish weapons and engineers to detail them—and then let the blueprints fall into enemy hands, thus lousing up their research.

On the other hand, when Mac-

(*Continued on page* 144)

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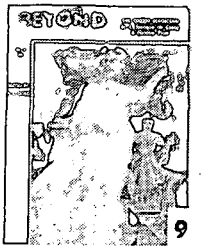

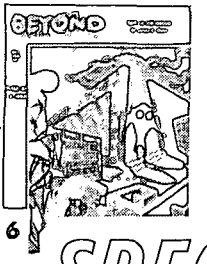

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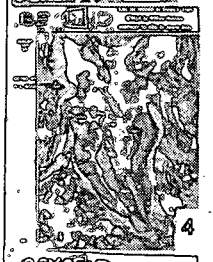

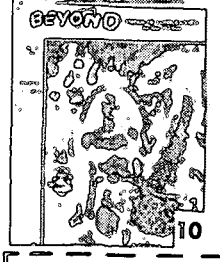

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Volpla

By WYMAN GUIN

The only kind of gag worth pulling, I always maintained, was a cosmic one—till I learned the Cosmos has a really nasty sense of humor!

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

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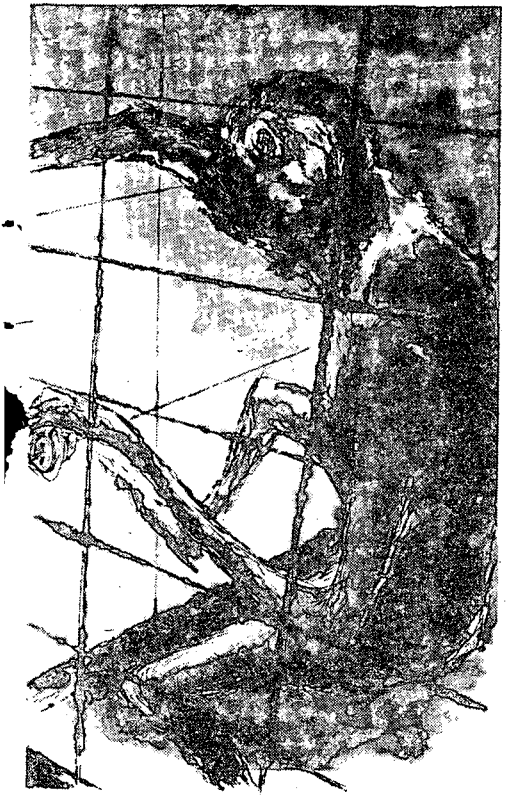

THERE WERE three of them. Dozens of limp little mutants that would have sent an academic zoologist into hysterics lay there in the metabolic accelerator. But there were three of *them*. My heart took a great bound.

I heard my daughter's running feet in the animal rooms and her rollerskates banging at her side. I closed the accelerator and walked across to the laboratory door. She twisted the knob violently, trying to hit a combination that would work.

I unlocked the door, held it against her pushing and slipped out so that, for all her peering, she could see nothing. I looked down on her tolerantly.

"Can't adjust your skates?" I asked again.

"Daddy, I've tried and tried and I just can't turn this old key tight enough."

I continued to look down on her.

"Well, Dad-dee, I can't!"

"Tightly enough."

"What?"

"You can't turn this old key tightly enough."

"That's what I *say*-yud."

"All right, wench. Sit on this chair."

I got down and shoved one saddle shoe into a skate. It fitted perfectly. I strapped her ankle and pretended to use the key to tighten the clamp.

Volplas at last. Three of them. Yet I had always been so sure I could create them that I had been calling them volplas for ten years. No, twelve. I glanced across the animal room to where old Nijinsky thrust his graying head from a cage. I had called them volplas since the day old Nijinsky's elongated arms and his cousin's lat-

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eral skin folds had given me the idea of a flying mutant.

WHEN NIJINSKY saw me looking at him, he started a little tarantella about his cage. I smiled with nostalgia when the fifth fingers of his hands, four times as long as the others, uncurled as he spun about the cage.

I turned to the fitting of my daughter's other skate.

"Daddy?"

"Yes?"

"Mother says you are eccentric. Is that true?"

"I'll speak to her about it."

"Don't you *know?*"

"Do you understand the word?"

"No."

I lifted her out of the chair and stood her on her skates. "Tell your mother that I retaliate. I say *she* is beautiful."

She skated awkwardly between the rows of cages from which mutants with brown fur and blue fur, too much and too little fur, enormously long and ridiculously short arms, stared at her with simian, canine or rodent faces. At the door to the outside, she turned perilously and waved.

Again in the laboratory, I entered the metabolic accelerator and withdrew the intravenous needles from my first volplas. I carried their limp little forms out to a mattress in the lab, two girls and a boy. The accelerator had forced them almost to adulthood in less than a month. It would be several hours before they would begin to move, to learn to feed and play, perhaps to learn to fly.

Meanwhile, it was clear that here was no war of dominant mutations. Modulating alleles had smoothed the freakish into a beautiful pattern. These were no monsters blasted by the dosage of radiation into crippled structures. They were lovely, perfect little creatures.

My wife tried the door, too, but more subtly, as if casually touching the knob while calling.

"Lunch, dear."

"Be right there."

She peeked too, as she had for fifteen years, but I blocked her view when I slipped out.

"Come on, you old hermit. I have a buffet on the terrace."

"Our daughter says I'm eccentric. Wonder how the devil she found out."

"From me, of course."

"But you love me just the same."

"I adore you." She stretched on tiptoe and put her arms over my shoulders and kissed me.

My wife did indeed have a delicious-looking buffet ready on the terrace. The maid was just setting down a warmer filled with hot hamburgers. I gave the maid a pinch and said, "Hello, baby."

My wife looked at me with a

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puzzled smile. "What on Earth's got into you?"

The maid beat it into the house.

I flipped a hamburger and a slice of onion onto a plate and picked up the ketchup and said, "I've reached the dangerous age."

"Oh, good heavens!"

I DOWSED ketchup over the hamburger, threw the onion on and closed it. I opened a bottle of beer and guzzled from it, blew out my breath and looked across the rolling hills and oak woods of our ranch to where the Pacific shimmered. I thought, "All this and three volplas, too."

I wiped the back of my hand across my mouth and said aloud, "Yes, sir, the dangerous age. And, lady, I'm going to have fun."

My wife sighed patiently.

I walked over and put the arm that held the beer bottle around her shoulder and chucked her chin up with my other hand. The golden sun danced in her blue eyes. I watched that light in her beautiful eyes and said, "But you're the only one I'm dangerous about."

I kissed her until I heard rollerskates coming across the terrace from one direction and a horse galloping toward the terrace from the other direction.

"You have lovely lips," I whispered.

"Thanks. Yours deserve the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval, too."

Our son reared the new palamino I had just bought him for his fourteenth birthday and yelled down, "Unhand that maiden, Burrhead, or I'll give you lead poisoning."

I laughed and picked up my plate and sat down in a chair. My wife brought me a bowl of salad and I munched the hamburger and watched the boy unsaddle the horse and slap it away to the pasture.

I thought, "By God, wouldn't he have a fit if he knew what I have back there in that lab! Wouldn't they all!"

The boy carried the saddle up onto the terrace and dropped it. "Mom, I'd like a swim before I eat." He started undressing.

"You *look* as though a little water might help," she agreed, sitting down next to me with her plate.

The girl was yanking off her skates. "And I want one."

"All right. But go in the house and put on your swim suit."

"Oh, *Mother*. Why?"

"Because, dear, I said so."

The boy had already raced across the terrace and jack-knifed into the pool. The cool sound of the dive sent the girl scurrying for her suit.

I looked at my wife. "What's the idea?"

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"She's going to be a young woman soon."

"Is that any reason for wearing clothes? Look at him. He's a young *man* sooner than already."

"Well, if you feel that way about it, they'll both have to start wearing clothes."

I gulped the last of my hamburger and washed it down with the beer. "This place is going to hell," I complained. "The old man isn't allowed to pinch the maid and the kids can't go naked." I leaned toward her and smacked her cheek. "But the food and the old woman are still the best."

"Say, what goes with you? You've been g r i n n i n g like a happy ape ever since you came out of the lab."

"I told you — "

"Oh, not that again! You were dangerous at any age."

I stood up and put my plate aside and bent over her. "Just the same, I'm going to have a new kind of fun."

SHE REACHED up and grabbed my ear. She narrowed her eyes and put a mock grimness on her lips.

"It's a joke," I assured her. "I'm going to play a tremendous joke on the whole world. I've only had the feeling once before in a small way, but I've always . . ."

She twisted my ear and narrowed her eyes even more. "Like?"

"Well, when my old man was pumping his first fortune out of some oil wells in Oklahoma, we lived down there. Outside this little town, I found a litter of flat stones that had young blacksnakes under each slab. I filled a pail with them and took them into town and dumped them on the walk in front of the movie just as Theda Bara's matinee let out. The best part was that no one had seen me do it. They just couldn't understand how so many snakes got there. I learned how great it can be to stand around quietly and watch people encounter the surprise that you have prepared for them."

She let go of my ear. "Is that the kind of fun you're going to have?"

"Yep."

She shook her head. "Did I say you are *eccentric*?"

I grinned. "Forgive me if I eat and run, dear. Something in the lab can't wait."

The fact was that I had something more in the lab than I had bargained for. I had aimed only at a gliding mammal a little more efficient than the Dusky Glider of Australia, a marsupial. Even in the basically mutating colony, there had been a decidedly simian appearance in recent years, a long shift from the garbage-dump

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rats I had started with. But my first volplas were shockingly humanoid.

They were also much faster than had been their predecessors in organizing their nervous activity after the slumbrous explosion of growth in the metabolic accelerator. When I returned to the lab, they were already moving about on the mattress and the male was trying to stand.

He was a little the larger and stood twenty-eight inches high. Except for the face, chest and belly, they were covered with a soft, almost golden down. Where it was bare of this golden fur, the skin was pink. On their heads and across the shoulders of the male stood a shock of fur as soft as chinchilla. The faces were appealingly humanoid, except that the eyes were large and nocturnal. The cranium was in the same proportion to the body as it is in the human.

WHEN THE male spread his arms, the span was forty-eight inches. I held his arms out and tried to tease the spars open. They were not new. The spars had been common to the basic colony for years and were the result of serial mutations effecting those greatly elongated fifth fingers that had first appeared in Nijinsky. No longer jointed like a finger, the spar turned backward sharply and ran alongside the wrist almost to the elbow. Powerful wrist muscles could snap it outward and forward. Suddenly, as I teased the male volpla, this happened.

The spars added nine inches on each side to his span. As they swept out and forward, the lateral skin that had, till now, hung in resting folds was tightened in a golden plane that stretched from the tip of the spar to his waist and continued four inches wide down his legs to where it anchored at the little toe.

This was by far the most impressive plane that had appeared till now. It was a true gliding plane, perhaps even a soaring one. I felt a thrill run along my back.

By four o'clock that afternoon, I was feeding them solid food and, with the spars closed, they were holding little cups and drinking water from them in a most humanlike way. They were active, curious, playful and decidedly amorous.

Their humanoid qualities were increasingly apparent. There was a lumbar curvature and buttocks. The shoulder girdle and pectoral muscles were heavy and out of proportion, of course, yet the females had only one pair of breasts. The chin and jaw were humanlike instead of simian and the dental equipment was appro-

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priate to this structure. What this portended was brought home to me with a shock.

I was kneeling on the mattress, cuffing and roughing the male as one might a puppy dog, when one of the females playfully climbed up my back. I reached around and brought her over my shoulder and sat her down. I stroked the soft fur on her head and said, "Hello, pretty one. Hello."

The male watched me, grinning.

He said, "'Ello, 'ello."

AS I walked into the kitchen, giddy with this enormous joke, my wife said, "Guy and Em are flying up for dinner. That rocket of Guy's they launched in the desert yesterday was a success. It pulled Guy up to Cloud Nine and he wants to celebrate."

I danced a little jig the way old Nijinsky might do it. "Oh, great! Oh, wonderful! Good old Guy! Everybody's a success. It's great. It's wonderful. Success on success!"

I danced into the kitchen table and tipped over a basket of green corn. The maid promptly left the kitchen for some other place.

My wife just stared at me. "Have you been drinking the lab alcohol?"

"I've been drinking the nectar of the gods. My Hera, you're properly married to Zeus. I've my own little Greeks descended from Icarus."

She pretended a hopeless sag of her pretty shoulders. "Wouldn't you just settle for a worldly martini?"

"I will, yes. But first a divine kiss."

I sipped at my martini and lounged in a terrace chair watching the golden evening slant across the beautiful hills of our ranch. I dreamed. I would invent a euphonious set of words to match the Basic English vocabulary and teach it to them as their language. They would have their own crafts and live in small tree houses.

I would teach them legends: that they had come from the stars, that they had subsequently watched the first red men and then the first white men enter these hills.

When they were able to take care of themselves, I would turn them loose. There would be volpla colonies all up and down the Coast before anyone suspected. One day, somebody would see a volpla. The newspapers would laugh.

Then someone authoritative would find a colony and observe them. He would conclude, "I am convinced that they have a language and speak it intelligently."

The government would issue denials. Reporters would "expose

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the truth" and ask, "Where have these aliens come from?" The government would reluctantly admit the facts. Linguists would observe at close quarters and learn the simple volpla language. Then would come the legends.

Volpla wisdom would become a cult — and of all forms of comedy, cults, I think, are the funniest.

"DARLING, ARE you listening to me?" my wife asked with impatient patience.

"What? Sure. Certainly."

"You didn't hear a word. You just sit there and grin into space." She got up and poured me another martini. "Here, maybe this will sober you up."

I pointed. "That's probably Guy and Em."

A 'copter sidled over the ridge, then came just above the oak woods toward us. Guy set it gently on the landing square and we walked down to meet them.

I helped Em out and hugged her. Guy jumped out, asking, "Do you have your TV set on?"

"No," I answered. "Should I?"

"It's almost time for the broadcast. I was afraid we would miss it."

"What broadcast?"

"From the rocket."

"Rocket?"

"For heaven's sake, darling," my wife complained, "I told you about Guy's rocket being a success. The papers are full of it. So are the broadcasts."

As we stepped up on the terrace, she turned to Guy and Em. "He's out of contact today. Thinks he's Zeus."

I asked our son to wheel a TV set out onto the terrace while I made martinis for our friends. Then we sat down and drank the cocktails and the kids had fruit juice and we watched the broadcast Guy had tuned in.

Some joker from Cal Tech was explaining diagrams of a multistage rocket.

After a bit, I got up and said, "I have something out in the lab I want to check on."

"Hey, wait a minute," Guy objected. "They're about to show the shots of the launching."

My wife gave me a look; you know the kind. I sat down. Then I got up and poured myself another martini and freshened Em's up, too. I sat down again.

The scene had changed to a desert launching site. There was old Guy himself explaining that when he pressed the button before him, the hatch on the third stage of the great rocket in the background would close and, five minutes later, the ship would fire itself.

Guy, on the screen, pushed the button, and I heard Guy, beside me, give a sort of little sigh. We

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watched the hatch slowly close.

"You look real good," I said. "A regular Space Ranger. What are you shooting at?"

"Darling, will you please — be — *quiet?*"

"Yeah, Dad. Can it, will you? You're always gagging around."

ON THE screen, Guy's big dead-earnest face was explaining more about the project and suddenly I realized that this was an instrument-bearing rocket they hoped to land on the Moon. It would broadcast from there. Well, now — say, that *would* be something! I began to feel a little ashamed of the way I had been acting and I reached out and slapped old Guy on the shoulder. For just a moment, I thought of telling him about my volplas. But only for a moment.

A ball of flame appeared at the base of the rocket. Miraculously, the massive tower lifted, seemed for a moment merely to stand there on a flaming pillar, then was gone.

The screen returned to a studio, where an announcer explained that the film just shown had been taken day before yesterday. Since then, the rocket's third stage was known to have landed successfully at the south shore of Mare Serenitatis. He indicated the location on a large lunar map behind him.

"From this position, the telemeter known as Rocket Charlie will be broadcasting scientific data for several months. But now, ladies and gentlemen, we will clear the air for Rocket Charlie's only general broadcast. Stand by for Rocket Charlie."

A chronometer appeared on the screen and, for several seconds, there was silence.

I heard my boy whisper, "Uncle Guy, this is the biggest!"

My wife said, "Em, I think I'll just faint."

Suddenly there was a lunar landscape on the screen, looking just as it's always been pictured. A mechanical voice cut in.

"This is Rocket Charlie saying, 'Hello, Earth,' from my position in Mare Serenitatis. First I will pan the Menelaus Mountains for fifteen seconds. Then I will focus my camera on Earth for five seconds."

The camera began to move and the mountains marched by, stark and awesomely wild. Toward the end of the movement, the shadow of the upright third stage appeared in the foreground.

Abruptly the camera made a giddy swing, focused a moment, and we were looking at Earth. At that time, there was no Moon over California. It was Africa and Europe we were looking at.

"This is Rocket Charlie saying, 'Good-by, Earth.'"

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Well, when that screen went dead, there was pandemonium around our terrace. Big old Guy was so happy, he was wiping tears from his eyes. The women were kissing him and hugging him. Everybody was yelling at once.

I USED THE metabolic accelerator to cut the volplas' gestation down to one week. Then I used it to bring the infants to maturity in one month. I had luck right off. Quite by accident, the majority of the early infants were females, which sped things up considerably.

By the next spring, I had a colony of over a hundred volplas and I shut down the accelerator. From now on, they could have babies in their own way.

I had devised the language for them, using Basic English as my model, and during the months while every female was busy in the metabolic accelerator, I taught the language to the males. They spoke it softly in high voices and the eight hundred words didn't seem to tax their little skulls a bit.

My wife and the kids went down to Santa Barbara for a week and I took the opportunity to slip the oldest of the males and his two females out of the lab.

I put them in the jeep beside me and drove to a secluded little valley about a mile back in the ranch.

They were all three wide-eyed at the world and jabbered continuously. They kept me busy relating their words for "tree," "rock," "sky" to the objects. They had a little trouble with "sky."

Until I had them out in the open country, it had been impossible to appreciate fully what lovely little creatures they were. They blended perfectly with the California landscape. Occasionally, when they raised their arms, the spars would open and spread those glorious planes.

Almost two hours went by before the male made it into the air. His playful curiosity about the world had been abandoned momentarily and he was chasing one of the girls. As usual, she was anxious to be caught and stopped abruptly at the bottom of a little knoll.

He probably meant to dive for her. But when he spread his arms, the spars snapped out and those golden planes sheared into the air. He sailed over her in a stunning sweep. Then he rose up and up until he hung in the breeze for a long moment, thirty feet above the ground.

He turned a plaintive face back to me, dipped worriedly and skimmed straight for a thorn bush. He banked instinctively, whirled toward us in a golden

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flash and crashed with a bounce to the grass.

The two girls reached him before I did and stroked and fussed over him so that I could not get near. Suddenly he laughed with a shrill little whoop. After that, it was a carnival.

THEY LEARNED quickly and brilliantly. They were not fliers; they were gliders and soarers. Before long, they took agilely to the trees and launched themselves in beautiful glides for hundreds of feet, banking, turning and spiraling to a gentle halt.

I laughed out loud with anticipation. Wait till the first pair of these was brought before a sheriff! Wait till reporters from the *Chornicle* motored out into the hills to witness this!

Of course, the volplas didn't want to return to the lab. There was a tiny stream through there and at one point it formed a sizable pool. They got into this and splashed their long arms about and they scrubbed each other. Then they got out and lay on their backs with the planes stretched to dry.

I watched them affectionately and wondered about the advisability of leaving them out here. Well, it had to be done sometime. Nothing I could tell them about surviving would help them as much as a little actual surviving. I called the male over to me.

He came and squatted, conference fashion, the elbows resting on the ground, the wrists crossed at his chest. He spoke first.

"Before the red men came, did we live here?"

"You lived in places like this all along these mountains. Now there are very few of you left. Since you have been staying at my place, you naturally have forgotten the ways of living outdoors."

"We can learn again. We want to stay here." His little face was so solemn and thoughtful that I reached out and stroked the fur on his head reassuringly.

We both heard the whir of wings overhead. Two mourning doves flew across the stream and landed in an oak on the opposite hillside.

I pointed. "There's your food, if you can kill it."

He looked at me. "How?"

"I don't think you can get at them in the tree. You'll have to soar up above and catch one of them on the wing when they fly away. Think you can get up that high?"

He looked around slowly at the breeze playing in the branches and dancing along the hillside grass. It was as if he had been flying a thousand years and was bringing antique wisdom to bear. "I can get up there. I can stay

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for a while. How long will they be in the tree?"

"Chances are they won't stay long. Keep your eye on the tree in case they leave while you are climbing."

HE RAN to a nearby oak and clambered aloft. Presently he launched himself, streaked down-valley a way and caught a warm updraft on a hillside. In no time, he was up about two hundred feet. He began criss-crossing the ridge, working his way back to us.

The two girls were watching him intently. They came over to me wonderingly, stopping now and then to watch him. When they were standing beside me, they said nothing. They shaded their eyes with tiny hands and watched him as he passed directly above us at about two hundred and fifty feet. One of the girls, with her eyes fast on his soaring planes, reached out and grasped my sleeve tightly.

He flashed high above the stream and hung behind the crest of the hill where the doves rested. I heard their mourning from the oak tree. It occurred to me they would not leave that safety while the hawklike silhouette of the volpla marred the sky so near.

I took the girl's hand from my sleeve and spoke to her, pointing as I did so. "He is going to catch a bird. The bird is in that tree. You can make the bird fly so that he can catch it. Look here." I got up and found a stick. "Can you do this?"

I threw the stick up into a tree near us. Then I found her a stick. She threw it better than I had expected.

"Good, pretty one. Now run across the stream and up to that tree and throw a stick into it."

She climbed skillfully into the tree beside us and launched herself across the stream. She swooped up the opposite hillside and landed neatly in the tree where the doves rested.

The birds came out of the tree, climbing hard with their graceful strokes.

I looked back, as did the girl remaining beside me. The soaring volpla half closed his planes and started dropping. He became a golden flash across the sky.

The doves abruptly gave up their hard climbing and fell away with swiftly beating wings. I saw one of the male volpla's planes open a little. He veered giddily in the new direction and again dropped like a molten arrow.

The doves separated and began to zigzag down the valley. The volpla did something I would not have anticipated — he opened his planes and shot lower than the bird he was after, then swept up and intercepted the bird's

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crossward flight.

I saw the planes close momentarily. Then they opened again and the bird plummeted to a hillside. The volpla landed gently atop the hill and stood looking back at us.

The volpla beside me danced up and down shrieking in a language all her own. The girl who had raised the birds from the tree volplaned back to us, yammering like a bluejay.

IT WAS a hero's welcome. He had to walk back, of course — he had no way to carry such a load in flight. The girls glided out to meet him. Their lavish affection held him up for a time, but eventually he strutted in like every human hunter.

They were raptly curious about the bird. They poked at it, marveled at its feathers and danced about it in an embryonic rite of the hunt. But presently the male turned to me

"We *eat* this?"

I laughed and took his tiny, four-fingered hand. In a sandy spot beneath a great tree that overhung the creek, I built a small fire for them. This was another marvel, but first I wanted to teach them how to clean the

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bird. I showed them how to spit it and turn it over their fire.

Later, I shared a small piece of the meat in their feast. They were gleeful and greasily amorous during the meal.

When I had to leave, it was dark. I warned them to stand watches, keep the fire burning low and take to the tree above if anything approached. The male walked a little away with me when I left the fire.

I said again, "Promise me you won't leave here until we've made you ready for it."

"We like it here. We will stay. Tomorrow you bring more of us?"

"Yes. I will bring many more of you, if you promise to keep them all here in this woods until they're ready to leave."

"I promise." He looked up at the night sky and, in the firelight, I saw his wonder. "You say we came from there?"

"The old ones of your kind told me so. Didn't they tell you?"

"I can't remember any old ones. You tell me."

"The old ones told me you came long before the red men in a ship from the stars." Standing there in the dark, I had to grin, visioning the Sunday supplements that would be written in

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about a year, maybe even less.

He looked into the sky for a long time. "Those little lights are the stars?"

"That's right."

"Which star?"

I glanced about and presently pointed over a tree. "From Venus." Then I realized I had blundered by passing him an English name. "In your language, Pohtah."

He looked at the planet a long time and murmured, "Venus. Pohtah."

THAT NEXT week, I transported all of the volplas out to the oak woods. There were a hundred and seven men, women and children. With no design on my part, they tended to segregate into groups consisting of four to eight couples together with the current children of the women. Within these groups, the adults were promiscuous, but apparently not outside the group. The group thus had the appearance of a super-family and the males indulged and cared for all the children without reference to actual parenthood.

By the end of the week, these super-families were scattered over about four square miles of the ranch. They had found a new delicacy, sparrows, and hunted them easily as they roosted at night. I had taught the volplas to use the fire drill and they were already utilizing the local grasses, vines and brush to build marvelously contrived tree houses in which the young, and sometimes the adults, slept through midday and midnight.

The afternoon my family returned home, I had a crew of workmen out tearing down the animal rooms and lab building. The caretakers had anesthetized all the experimental mutants, and the metabolic accelerator and other lab equipment was being dismantled. I wanted nothing around that might connect the sudden appearance of the volplas with my property. It was already apparent that it would take the volplas only a few more weeks to learn their means of survival and develop an embryonic culture of their own. Then they could leave my ranch and the fun would be on.

My wife got out of the car and looked around at the workmen hurrying about the disemboweled buildings and she said, "What on Earth is going on here?"

"I've finished my work and we no longer need the buildings. I'm going to write a paper about my results.

My wife looked at me appraisingly and shook her head. "I thought you meant it. But you really ought to. It would be your first."

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My son asked, "What happened to the animals?"

"Turned them over to the university for further study," I lied.

"Well," he said to her, "you can't say our pop isn't a man of decision."

Twenty-four hours later, there wasn't a sign of animal experimentation on the ranch.

Except, of course, that the woods were full of volplas. At night, I could hear them faintly when I sat out on the terrace. As they passed through the dark overhead, they chattered and laughed and sometimes moaned in winged love. One night a flight of them soared slowly across the face of the full Moon, but I was the only one who noticed.

I MADE DAILY trips out to the original camp to meet the oldest of the males, who had apparently established himself as a chief of all the volpla families. He assured me that the volplas were staying close to the ranch, but complained that the game was getting scarce. Otherwise things were progressing nicely.

The males now carried little stone-tipped spears with feathered shafts that they could throw in flight. They used them at night to bring down roosting sparrows and in the day to kill their biggest game, the local rabbits.

The women wore bluejay feathers on their heads. The men wore plumes of dove feathers and sometimes little skirts fashioned of rabbit down. I did some reading on the subject and taught them crude tanning of their rabbit and squirrel hides for use in their tree homes.

The tree homes were more and more intricately wrought with expert basketry for walls and floor and tight thatching above. They were well camouflaged from below, as I suggested.

These little creatures delighted me more and more. For hours, I could watch the adults, both the males and females, playing with the children or teaching them to glide. I could sit all afternoon and watch them at work on a tree house.

So one day my wife asked, "How *does* the mighty hunter who now returns from the forest?"

"Oh, fine. I've been enjoying the local animal life."

"So has our daughter."

"What do you mean?"

"She has two of them up in her room."

"Two what?"

"I don't know. What do *you* call them?"

I went up the stairs three at a time and burst into my daughter's room.

There she sat on her bed reading a book to two volplas.

One of the volplas grinned and

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said in English, "Hello there, King Arthur."

"What's going on here?" I demanded of all three.

"Nothing, Daddy. We're just reading like we always do."

"Like *always?* How long has this been going on?"

"Oh, weeks and weeks. How long has it been since you came here that first time to visit me, Fuzzy?"

The impolite volpla who had addressed me as King Arthur grinned at her and calculated. "Oh, weeks and weeks."

"But you're teaching them to read English."

"Of course. They're such good pupils and so grateful. Daddy, you won't make them go away, will you? We love each other, don't we?"

Both volplas nodded vigorously.

She turned back to me. "Daddy, did you know they can fly? They can fly right out of the window and way up in the sky."

"Is that a fact?" I said testily. I looked coldly at the two volplas. "I'm going to speak to your chief."

BACK DOWNSTAIRS again, I raved at my wife. "Why didn't you tell me a thing like this was going on? How could you let such an unusual thing go on and not discuss it with me?"

My wife got a look on her face that I don't see very often. "Now you listen to me, mister. Your whole life is a secret from us. Just what makes you think your daughter can't have a little secret of her own?"

She got right up close to me and her blue eyes snapped little sparks all over me. "The fact is that I was wrong to tell you at all. I promised her I wouldn't tell *anyone.* Look what happened when I did. You go leaping around the house like a raving maniac just because a little girl has a secret."

"A fine secret!" I yelled. "Didn't it occur to you this might be dangerous? Those creatures are oversexed and . . ." I stumbled into an awful silence while she gave me the dirtiest smile since the days of the Malatestas.

"How did *you* . . . suddenly get to *be* . . . the palace eunuch? Those are sweet lovable little creatures without a harm in their furry little bodies. But don't think I don't realize what's been going on. You created them yourself. So, if they have any dirty ideas, I know where they got them."

I stormed out of the house. I spun the jeep out of the yard and ripped off through the woods.

The chief was sitting at home as comfortable as you please. He was leaning back against the great oak that hid his tree house. He had a little fire going and one

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of the women was roasting a sparrow for him. He greeted me in volpla language.

"Do you realize," I blurted angrily, "that there are two volplas in my daughter's bedroom?"

"Why, yes," he answered calmly. "They go there every day. Is there anything wrong with that?"

"She's teaching them the words of men."

"You told us some men may be our enemies. We are anxious to know their words, the better to protect ourselves."

He reached around behind the tree and, right there in broad daylight, that volpla pulled a copy of the San Francisco *Chronicle* out of hiding. He held it up apologetically. "We have been taking it for some time from the box in front of your house."

He spread the paper on the ground between us. I saw by the date that it was yesterday's. He said proudly, "From the two who go to your house, I have learned the words of men. As men say, I can 'read' most of this."

I JUST STOOD there gaping at him. How could I possibly recoup this situation so that the stunning joke of the volplas wouldn't be lost? Would it seem reasonable that the volplas, by observing and listening to men, had learned their language? Or had they been taught it by a human friend?

That was it — I would just have to sacrifice anonymity. My family and I had found a colony of them on our ranch and taught them English. I was stuck with it because it was the truth.

The volpla waved his long thin arm over the front page. "Men are dangerous. They will shoot us with their guns if we leave here."

I hastened to reassure him. "It will not be like that. When men have learned about you, they will leave you alone." I stated this emphatically, but for the first time I was beginning to see this might not be a joke to the volplas. Nevertheless, I went on. "You must disperse the families at once. You stay here wtih your family so we remain in contact, but send the other families to other places."

He shook his head. "We cannot leave these woods. Men would shoot us."

Then he stood and looked squarely at me with his nocturnal eyes. "Perhaps you are not a good friend. Perhaps you have lied to us. Why are you saying we should leave this safety?"

"You will be happier. There will be more game."

He continued to stare directly at me. "There will be men. One has already shot one of us. We have forgiven him and are

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friends. But one of us is dead."

"You are friends with *another* man?" I asked, stunned.

He nodded and pointed up the valley. "He is up there today with another family."

"Let's go!"

He had the advantage of short glides, but the volpla chief couldn't keep up with me. Sometimes trotting, sometimes walking fast, I got way ahead of him. My hard breathing arose as much out of my anxiety about the manner of handling this stranger as it did out of the exertion.

I rounded a bend in the creek and there was my son sitting on the grass near a cooking fire playing with a baby volpla and talking in English to an adult volpla who stood beside him. As I approached, my son tossed the baby into the air. The tiny planes opened and the baby drifted down to his waiting hands.

He said to the volpla beside him, "No, I'm sure you didn't come from the stars. The more I think about it, the more I'm sure my father—"

I yelled from behind them, "What business do you have telling them that?"

THE MALE volpla jumped about two feet. My son turned his head slowly and looked at me. Then he handed the baby to the male and stood up.

"You haven't any business out here!" I was seething. He had destroyed the whole store of volpla legends with one small doubt.

He brushed the grass from his trousers and straightened. The way he was looking at me, I felt my anger turning to a kind of jelly.

"Dad, I killed one of these little people yesterday. I thought he was a hawk and I shot him when I was out hunting. I wouldn't have done that if you had told me about them."

I couldn't look at him. I stared at the grass and my face got hot.

"The chief tells me that you want them to leave the ranch soon. You think you're going to play a big joke, don't you?"

I heard the chief come up behind me and stand quietly at my back.

My son said softly, "I don't think it's much of a joke, Dad. I had to listen to that one crying after I hit him."

There were big black trail ants moving in the grass. It seemed to me there was a ringing sound in the sky. I raised my head and looked at him. "Son, let's go back to the jeep and we can talk about it on the way home."

"I'd rather walk." He sort of waved to the volpla he had been talking to and then to the chief. He jumped the creek and walked away into the oak woods.

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The volpla holding the baby stared at me. From somewhere far up the valley, a crow was cawing. I didn't look at the chief. I turned and brushed past him and walked back to the jeep alone.

At home, I opened a bottle of beer and sat out on the terrace to wait for my son. My wife came toward the house with some cut flowers from the garden, but she didn't speak to me. She snapped the blades of the scissors as she walked.

A volpla soared across the terrace and landed at my daughter's bedroom window. He was there only briefly and relaunched himself. He was followed from the window in moments by the two volplas I had left with my daughter earlier in the afternoon. I watched them with a vague unease as the three veered off to the east, climbing effortlessly.

When I finally took a sip of my beer, it was already warm. I set it aside. Presently my daughter ran out onto the terrace.

"Daddy, my volplas left. They said good-by and we hadn't even finished the TV show. They said they won't see me again. Did you make them leave?"

"No. I didn't."

She was staring at me with hot eyes. Her lower lip protruded and trembled like a pink tear drop.

"Daddy, you did so." She stomped into the house, sobbing.

My God! In one afternoon, I had managed to become a palace eunuch, a murderer and a liar!

MOST OF the afternoon went by before I heard my son enter the house. I called to him and he came out and stood before me. I got up.

"Son, I can't tell you how sorry I am for what happened to you. It was my fault, not yours at all. I only hope you can forget the shock of finding out what sort of creature you had hit. I don't know why I didn't anticipate that such things would happen. It was just that I was so intent on mystifying the whole world that I..."

I stopped. There wasn't anything more to say.

"Are you going to make them leave the ranch?" he asked.

I was aghast. "After what has happened?"

"Gee, what *are* you going to do about them, Dad?"

"I've been trying to decide. I don't know what I should do that will be best for them." I looked at my watch. "Let's go back out and talk to the chief."

His eyes lighted and he clapped me on the shoulder, man to man. We ran out and got into the jeep and drove back up to the valley. The late afternoon Sun glared across the landscape.

We didn't say much as we wound up the valley between the

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darkening trees. I was filled more and more with the unease that had seized me as I watched the three volplas leave my terrace and climb smoothly and purposefully into the east.

We got out at the chief's camp and there were no volplas around. The fire had burned down to a smolder. I called in the volpla language, but there was no answer.

We went from camp to camp and found dead fires. We climbed to their tree houses and found them empty. I was sick and scared. I called endlessly till I was hoarse.

At last, in the darkness, my son put a hand on my arm. "What are you going to do, Dad?"

Standing there in those terribly silent woods, I trembled. "I'll have to call the police and the newspapers and warn everybody."

"Where do you suppose they've gone?"

I looked to the east where the stars, rising out of the great pass in the mountains, glimmered like a deep bowl of fireflies.

"The last three I saw were headed that way."

WE HAD been gone from the house for hours. When we stepped out onto the lighted terrace, I saw the shadow of a helicopter down on the strip. Then I saw Guy sitting near me in a chair. He was holding his head in his hands.

Em was saying to my wife, "He was beside himself. There wasn't a thing he could do. I had to get him away from there and I thought you wouldn't mind if we flew over here and stayed with you till they've decided what to do."

I walked over and said, "Hello, Guy. What's the matter?"

He raised his head and then stood and shook hands. "It's a mess. The whole project will be ruined and we don't dare go near it."

"What happened?"

"Just as we set it off—"

"Set what off?"

"The rocket."

"Rocket?"

Guy groaned.

"The *Venus* rocket! Rocket Harold!"

My wife interjected. "I was telling Guy we didn't know a thing about it because they haven't delivered our paper in weeks. I've complained—"

I waved her to silence. "Go on," I demanded of Guy.

"Just as I pushed the button and the hatch was closing, a flock of owls circled the ship. They started flying through the hatch and somehow they jammed it open."

Em said to my wife, "There must have been a hundred of

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them. They kept coming and coming and flying into that hatch. Then they began dumping out all the recording instruments. The men tried to run a motor-driven ladder up to the ship and those owls hit the driver on the head and knocked him out with some kind of instrument."

Guy turned his grief-stricken face to me. "Then the hatch closed and we don't dare go near the ship. It was supposed to fire in five minutes, but it hasn't. Those damned owls could have..."

There was a glare in the east. We all turned and saw a brief streak of gilt pencil its way up the black velvet beyond the mountains.

"That's it!" Guy shouted. "That's the ship!" Then he moaned. "A total loss."

I grabbed him by the shoulders. "You mean it won't make it to Venus?"

He jerked away in misery. "Sure, it will make it. The automatic controls can't be tampered with. But the rocket is on its way without any recording instruments or TV aboard. Just a load of owls."

My son laughed. "Owls! My dad can tell you a thing or two."

I silenced him with a scowl. He shut up, then danced off across the terrace. "Man, man! This is the biggest! The most—the greatest— the end!"

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THE PHONE was ringing. As I went to the box on the terrace, I grabbed my boy's arm. "Don't you breathe a word."

He giggled. "The joke is on you, Pop. Why should I say anything? I'll just grin once in a while."

"Now you cut that out."

He held onto my arm and walked toward the phone box with me, half convulsed. "Wait till men land on Venus and find Venusians with a legend about their Great White Father in California. That's when I'll tell."

The phone call was from a screaming psychotic who wanted Guy. I stood near Guy while he listened to the excited voice over the wire.

Presently Guy said, "No, no. The automatic controls will correct for the delay in firing. It isn't that. It's just that there aren't any instruments. . . What? What just happened? Calm down. I can't understand you."

I heard Em say to my wife, "You know, the strangest thing occurred out there. I *thought* it looked like those owls were carrying things on their backs. One of them dropped something and I saw the men open a package wrapped in a leaf. You'd never believe what was in it—three little birds roasted to a nice brown!"

My son nudged me. "Smart owls. Long trip."

I put my hand over his mouth. Then I saw that Guy was holding the receiver limply away from his ear.

He spluttered. "They just taped a radio message from the rocket. It's true that the radio wasn't thrown out. But we didn't have a record like *this* on that rocket."

He yelled into the phone. "Play it back." He thrust the receiver at me.

For a moment, there was only a gritty buzz from the receiver. Then the tape started playing a soft, high voice. "This is Rocket Harold saying everything is well. This is Rocket Harold saying good-by to men." There was a pause and then, in clear volpla language, another voice spoke. "Man who made us, we forgive you. We know we did not come from the stars, but we go there. I, chief, give you welcome to visit. Good-by."

WE ALL stood around too exhausted by the excitement to say anything. I was filled with a big, sudden sadness.

I stood for a long time and looked out to the east, where the sprawling mountain range held a bowl of dancing fireflies between her black breasts.

Presently I said to old Guy, "How long do you think it will be before you have a manned rocket ready for Venus?"

— WYMAN GUIN

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Name your symptom

By JIM HARMON

Illustrated by WEISS

Anybody who shunned a Cure needed his head examined — assuming he had one left!

HENRY INFIELD placed the insulated circlet on his head gently. The gleaming rod extended above his head about a foot, the wires from it leading down into his collar, along his spine and finally out his pants leg to a short metallic strap that dragged on the floor.

Clyde Morgan regarded his partner. "Suppose — just suppose — you *were* serious about this, why not just the shoes?"

Infield turned his soft blue eyes to the black and tan oxfords with the very thick rubber soles. "They might get soaked through."

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Morgan took his foot off the chair behind the desk and sat down. "Suppose they were soaked through and you were standing on a metal plate — steps or a manhole cover — what good would your lightning rod do you then?"

Infield shrugged slightly. "I suppose a man must take some chances."

Morgan said, "You can't do it, Henry. You're crossing the line. The people we treat are on one side of the line and we're on the other. If you cross that line, you won't be able to treat people again."

The small man looked out the large window, blinking myopically at the brassy sunlight. "That's just it, Clyde. There is a line between us, a wall. How can we really understand the people who come to us, if we hide on our side of the wall?"

Morgan shook his thick head, ruffling his thinning red hair. "I dunno, Henry, but staying on our side is a pretty good way to keep sane and that's quite an accomplishment these days."

Infield whirled and stalked to the desk. "That's the answer! The whole world is going mad and we are just sitting back watching it hike along. Do you know that what we are doing is really the most primitive medicine in the world? We are treating the symptoms and not the disease. One cannibal walking another with sleeping sickness doesn't cure anything. Eventually the savage dies — just as all those sick savages out in the street will die unless we can cure the disease, not only the indications."

MORGAN shifted his ponderous weight uneasily. "Now, Henry, it's no good to talk like that. We psychiatrists can't turn back the clock. There just aren't enough of us or enough time to give that old-fashioned *therapy* to all the sick people."

Infield leaned on the desk and glared. "I called myself a psychiatrist once. But now I know we're semi-mechanics, semi-engineers, semi-inventors, semi lots of other things, but certainly not even semi-psychiatrists. A psychiatrist wouldn't give a foetic gyro to a man with claustrophobia."

His mind went back to the first gyro ball he had ever issued; the remembrance of his pride in the thing sickened him. Floating before him in memory was the vertical hoop and the horizontal hoop, both of shining steel-impervium alloy. Transfixed in the twin circles was the face of the patient, slack with smiles and sweat. But his memory was exaggerating the human element. The gyro actually passed over a man's shoulder, through his legs, under his arms.

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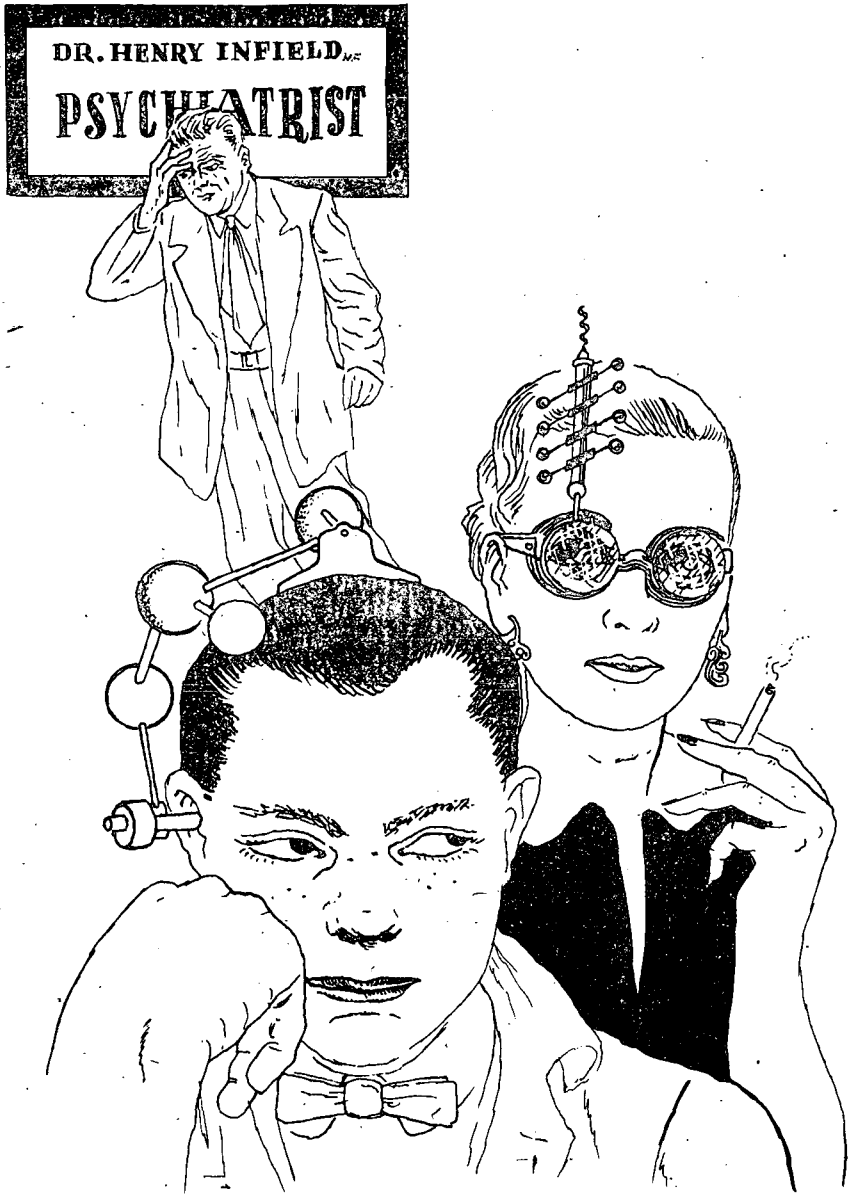

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Any time he felt the walls creeping in to crush him, he could withdraw his head and limbs into the circle and feel safe. Steel-impervium alloy could resist even a nuclear explosion. The foetic gyro ball was worn day and night, for life.

The sickness overcame him. He sat down on Morgan's desk. "That's just one thing, the gyro ball. There are so many others, so many."

Morgan smiled. "You know, Henry, not all of our Cures are so — so — not all are like that. Those Cures for mother complexes aren't even obvious. If anybody does see that button in a patient's ear, it looks like a hearing aid. Yet for a nominal sum, the patient is equipped to hear the soothing recorded voice of his mother saying, 'It's all right, everything's all right, Mommy loves you, it's all right . . .'"

"But *is* everything all right?" Infield asked intensely. "Suppose the patient is driving over one hundred on an icy road. He thinks about slowing down, but there's the voice in his ear. Or suppose he's walking down a railroad track and hears a train whistle — if he can hear anything over that verbal pablum gushing in his ear."

Morgan's face stiffened. "You know as well as I do that those voices are nearly subsonic. They don't cut a sense efficiency more than 23 per cent."

"At first, Clyde — only at first. But what about the severe case where we have to burn a three-dimensional smiling mother-image on the eyes of the patient with radiation? With that image over everything he sees and with that insidious voice drumming in his head night and day, do you mean to say that man's senses will only be impaired 23 per cent? Why, he'll turn violently schizophrenic sooner or later — and you know it. The only cure we have for that is still a straitjacket, a padded cell or one of those inhuman lobotomies."

Morgan shrugged helplessly. "You're an idealist."

"You're damned right!" Infield slammed the door behind him.

THE cool air of the street was a relief. Infield stepped into the main stream of human traffic and tried to adjust to the second change in the air. People didn't bathe very often these days.

He walked along, buffeted by the crowd, carried along in this direction, shoved back in that direction. Most people in the crowd seemed to be Normals, but you couldn't tell. Many "Cures" were not readily apparent.

A young man with black glasses and a radar headset (a photophobe) was unable to keep

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from being pushed against Infield. He sounded out the lightning rod, his face changing when he realized it must be some kind of Cure. "Pardon me," he said warmly.

"Quite all right."

It was the first time in years that anyone had apologized to Infield for anything. He had been one of those condemned Normals, more to be scorned than pitied. Perhaps he could really get to understand these people, now that he had taken down the wall.

Suddenly something else was pushing against Infield, forcing the air from his lungs. He stared down at the magnetic suction dart clinging leechlike to his chest. Model Acrophobe 101-X, he catalogued immediately. Description: safety belt. But his emotions didn't behave so well. He was thoroughly terrified, heart racing, sweat glands pumping. The impervium cable undulated vulgarly. *Some primitive fear of snake symbols?* his mind wondered while panic crushed him.

"Uncouple that cable!" the shout rang out. It was not his own.

A clean-cut young man with mouse-colored hair was moving toward the stubble-chinned, heavy-shouldered man quivering in the center of a web of impervium cables stuck secure to the walls and windows of buildings facing the street, the sidewalk, a mailbox, the lamp post and Infield.

Mouse-hair yelled hoarsely, "Uncouple it, Davies! Can't you see the guy's got a lightning rod? You're grounding him!

"I can't," Davies groaned. "I'm scared!"

Halfway down the twenty feet of cable, Mouse-hair grabbed on. "I'm holding it. Release it, you hear?"

Davies fumbled for the broad belt around his thickening middle. He jabbed the button that sent a negative current through the cable. The magnetic suction dart dropped away from Infield like a thing that had been alive and now was killed. He felt an overwhelming sense of relief.

AFTER breathing deeply for a few moments, he looked up to see Davies releasing and drawing all his darts into his belt, making it resemble a Hydra-sized spiked dog collar. Mouse-hair stood by tensely as the crowd disassembled.

"This isn't the first time you've pulled something like this, Davies," he said. "You weren't too scared to release that cable. You just don't care about other people's feelings. This is *official*."

Mouse-hair drove a fast, hard right into the soft blue flesh of Davies' chin. The big man fell silently.

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The other turned to Infield. "He was unconscious on his feet," he explained. "He never knew he fell."

"What did you mean by that punch being official?" Infield asked while trying to arrange his feelings into the comfortable, familiar patterns.

The young man's eyes almost seemed to narrow, although his face didn't move; he merely radiated narrowed eyes. "How long have you been Cured?"

"Not — not long," Infield evaded.

The other glanced around the street. He moistened his lips and spoke slowly. "Do you think you might be interested in joining a fraternal organization of the Cured?"

Infield's pulse raced, trying to get ahead of his thoughts, and losing out. A chance to study a pseudo-culture of the "Cured" developed in isolation! "Yes, I think I might. I owe you a drink for helping me out. How about it?"

The man's face paled so fast, Infield thought for an instant that he was going to faint. "All right. I'll risk it." He touched the side of his face away from the psychiatrist.

Infield shifted around, trying to see that side of his benefactor, but couldn't manage it in good grace. He wondered if the fellow was sporting a Mom-voice hearing aid and was afraid of raising her ire. He cleared his throat, noticing the affectation of it. "My name's Infield."

"Price," the other answered absently. "George Price. I suppose they have liquor at the Club. We can have a *drink* there, I guess."

Price set the direction and Infield fell in at his side. "Look, if you don't drink, I'll buy you a cup of coffee. It was just a suggestion."

UNDER the mousy hair, Price's strong features were beginning to gleam moistly. "You are lucky in one way, Mr. Infield. People take one look at your Cure and don't ask you to go walking in the rain. But even after seeing *this*, some people still ask me to have a drink." *This* was revealed, as he turned his head, to be a small metal cube above his left ear.

Infield supposed it was a Cure, although he had never issued one like it. He didn't know if it would be good form to inquire what kind it was.

"It's a cure for alcoholism," Price told him. "It runs a constant blood check to see that the alcohol level doesn't go over the sobriety limit."

"What happens if you take one too many?"

Price looked off as if at some-

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thing not particularly interesting, but more interesting than what he was saying. "It drives a needle into my temple and kills me."

The psychiatrist felt cold fury rising in him. The Cures were supposed to save lives, not endanger them.

"What kind of irresponsible idiot could have issued such a device?" he demanded angrily.

"I did," Price said. "I used to be a psychiatrist. I was always good in shop. This is a pretty effective mechanism, if I say so myself. It can't be removed without causing my death and it's indestructible. Impervium-shielded, you see."

Price probably would never get crazed enough for liquor to kill himself, Infield knew. The threat of death would keep him constantly shocked sane. Men hide in the comforts of insanity, but when faced with death, they are often forced back to reality. A man can't move his legs; in a fire, though, he may run. His legs were definitely paralyzed before and may be again, but for one moment he would forget the moral defeat of his life and his withdrawal from life and live an enforced sanity. But sometimes the withdrawal was — or could become — too complete.

"We're here."

Infield looked up self-consciously and noticed that they had crossed two streets from his building and were standing in front of what appeared to be a small, dingy cafe. He followed Price through the screeching screen door.

They seated themselves at a small table with a red-checked cloth. Infield wondered why cheap bars and restaurants always used red-checked cloths. Then he looked closer and discovered the reason. They did a remarkably good job of camouflaging the spots of grease and alcohol.

A FAT man who smelled of the grease and alcohol of the tablecloths shuffled up to them with a towel on his arm, staring ahead of him at some point in time rather than space.

Price lit a cigarette with unsteady hands. "Reggie is studying biblical text. Cute gadget. His contact lenses are made up a lot of layers of polarized glass. Every time he blinks, the amount of polarization changes and a new page appears. His father once told him that if he didn't study his Bible and pray for him, his old dad would die."

The psychiatrist knew the threat on the father's part couldn't create such a fixation by itself. His eyebrows faintly inquired.

Price nodded jerkily. "Twenty years ago, at least."

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"What'll you have, Georgie?" Reggie asked.

The young man snubbed out his cigarette viciously. "Bourbon. Straight."

Reggie smiled — a toothy, vacant, comedy-relief smile. "Fine. The Good Book says a little wine is good for a man, or something like that. I don't remember exactly."

Of course he didn't, Infield knew. Why should he? It was useless to learn his Bible lessons to save his father, because it was obvious his father was dead. He would never succeed because there was no reason to succeed. But he had to try, didn't he, for his father's sake? He didn't hate his father for making him study. He didn't want him to die. He had to prove that.

Infield sighed. At least this device kept the man on his feet, doing some kind of useful work instead of rotting in a padded cell with a probably imaginary Bible. A man could cut his wrists with the edge of a sheet of paper if he tried long enough, so of course the Bible would be imaginary.

"But, Georgie," the waiter complained, "you know you won't drink it. You ask me to bring you drinks and then you just look at them. Boy, do you look funny when you're looking at drinks. Honest, Georgie, I want to laugh when I think of the way you look at a glass with a drink in it." He did laugh.

Price fumbled with the cigarette stub in the black iron ashtray, examining it with the skill of scientific observation. "Mr. Infield is buying me the drink and that makes it different."

Reggie went away. Price kept dissecting the tobacco and paper. Infield cleared his throat and again reminded himself against such obvious affectations. "You were telling me about some organization of the Cured," he said as a reminder.

PRICE looked up, no longer interested in the relic of a cigarette. He was suddenly intensely interested and intensely observant of the rest of the cafe. "Was I? I was? Well, suppose you tell me something. What do you really think of the Incompletes?"

The psychiatrist felt his face frown. "Who?"

"I forgot. You haven't been one of us long. The Incompletes is a truer name for the so-called Normals. Have you ever thought of just how dangerous these people are, Mr. Infield?"

"Frankly, no," Infield said, realizing it was not the right thing to say but tiring of constant pretense.

"You don't understand. Everyone has some little phobia or fixation. Maybe everyone didn't

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have one once, but after being told they did have them for generations, everyone who didn't have one developed a defense mechanism and an aberration so they would be normal. If that phobia isn't brought to the surface and Cured, it may arise any time and endanger other people. The only safe, good sound citizens are Cured. Those lacking Cures—the Incompletes—*must be dealt with.*"

Infield's throat went dry. "And you're the one to deal with them?"

"It's my Destiny." Price quickly added, "And yours, too, of course."

Infield nodded. Price was a demagogue, young, handsome, dynamic, likable, impassioned with his cause, and convinced that it was his divine destiny. He was a psychopathic egotist and a dangerous man. Doubly dangerous to Infield because, even though he was one of the few people who still read books from the old days of therapy to recognize Price for what he was, he nevertheless still liked the young man for the intelligence behind the egotism and the courage behind the fanaticism.

"How are we going to deal with the Incompletes?" Infield asked.

Price started to glance around the cafe, then half-shrugged, almost visibly thinking that he shouldn't run that routine into the ground. "We'll Cure them whether they want to be Cured or not — for their own good."

Infield felt cold inside. After a time, he found that the roaring was not just in his head. It was thundering outside. He was getting sick. Price was the type of man who could spread his ideas throughout the ranks of the Cured — if indeed the plot was not already universal, imposed upon many ill minds.

HE COULD picture an entirely Cured world and he didn't like the view. Every Cure cut down on the mental and physical abilities of the patient as it was, whether Morgan and the others admitted it or not. But if everyone had a crutch to lean on for one phobia, he would develop secondary symptoms.

People would start needing two Cures — perhaps a foetic gyro and a safety belt — then another and another. There would always be a crutch to lean on for one thing and then room enough to develop something else — until everyone would be loaded down with too many Cures to operate.

A Cure was a last resort, dope for a malignancy case, euthanasia for the hopeless. Enforced Cures would be a curse for the individual and the race.

But Infield let himself relax. How could anyone force a mechanical relief for neurotic or psy-

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chopathic symptoms on someone who didn't want or need it?

"Perhaps you don't see how it could be done," Price said. "I'll explain."

Reggie's heavy hand sat a straight bourbon down before Price and another before Infield. Price stared at the drink almost without comprehension of how it came to be. He started to sweat.

"George, drink it."

The voice belonged to a young woman, a blonde girl with pink skin and suave, draped clothes. In this den of the Cured, Infield thought half-humorously, it was surprising to see a Normal — an "Incomplete." But then he noticed something about the baby she carried. The Cure had been very simple. It wasn't even a mechanized half-human robot, just a rag doll. She sat down at the table.

"George," she said, "drink it. One drink won't raise your alcohol index to the danger point. You've got to get over this fear of even the sight or smell of liquor."

The girl turned to Infield. "You're one of us, but you're new, so you don't know about George. Maybe you can help if you do. It's all silly. He's not an alcoholic. He didn't need to put that Cure on his head. It's just an excuse for not drinking. All of this is just because a while back something happened to the baby here — " she adjusted the doll's blanket — "when he was drinking. Just drinking, not drunk.

"I don't remember what happened to the baby — it wasn't important. But George has been brooding about it ever since. I guess he thinks something else bad will happen because of liquor. That's silly. Why don't you tell him it's silly?"

"Maybe it is," Infield said softly. "You could take the shock if he downed that drink and the shock might do you good."

PRICE laughed shortly. "I feel like doing something very melodramatic, like throwing my drink — and yours — across the room, but I haven't got the guts to touch those glasses. Do it for me, will you? Cauterizing the bite might do me good if I'd been bitten by a rabid dog, but I don't have the nerve to do it."

Before Infield could move, Reggie came and set both drinks on a little circular tray. He moved away. "I knew it. That's all he did, just look at the drink. Makes me laugh."

Price wiped the sweat off his palms. Infield sat and thought. Mrs. Price cooed to the rag doll, unmindful of either of them now.

"You were explaining," the psychiatrist said. "You were going to tell me how you were going to Cure the Incompletes."

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"I said *we* were going to do it. Actually *you* will play a greater part than I, *Doctor* Infield."

The psychiatrist sat rigidly.

"You didn't think you could give me your right name in front of your own office building and that I wouldn't recognize you? I know some psychiatrists are sensitive about wearing Cures themselves, but it is a mark of honor of the completely sane man. You should be proud of your Cure and eager to Cure others. *Very* eager."

"Just what do you mean?" He already suspected Price's meaning.

Price leaned forward. "There is one phobia that is so widespread, a Cure is not even thought of — hypochondria. Hundreds of people come to your office for a Cure and you turn them away. Suppose you and the other Cured psychiatrists give *everybody* who comes to you a Cure?"

Infield gestured vaguely. "A psychiatrist wouldn't hand out Cures unless they were absolutely necessary."

"You'll feel differently after you've been Cured for a while yourself. Other psychiatrists have."

Before Infield could speak, a stubble-faced, barrel-chested man moved past their table. He wore a safety belt. It was the man Price had called Davies, the one who had fastened one of his safety lines to Infield in the street.

Davies went to the bar in the back. "Gimme a bottle," he demanded of a vacant-eyed Reggie. He came back toward them, carrying the bottle in one hand, brushing off rain drops with the other. He stopped beside Price and glared. Price leaned back. The chair creaked. Mrs. Price kept cooing to the doll.

"You made me fall," Davies accused.

Price shrugged. "You were unconscious. You never knew it."

Sweat broke out on Davies' forehead. "You broke the Code. Don't you think I can imagine how it was to fall? You louse!"

SUDDENLY, Davies triggered his safety belt. At close range, before the lines could fan out in a radius, all the lines in front attached themselves to Price, the ones at each side clung to their table and the floor, and all the others to the table behind Infield. Davies released all lines except those on Price, and then threw himself backward, dragging Price out of his chair and onto the floor. Davies didn't mind making others fall. They were always trying to make *him* fall just so they could laugh at him or pounce on him; why shouldn't he like to make them fall first?

Expertly, Davies moved forward and looped the loose lines

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around Price's head and shoulders and then around his feet. He crouched beside Price and shoved the bottle into the gasping mouth and poured.

Price twisted against the binding lines in blind terror, gagging and spouting whiskey. Davies laughed and tilted the bottle more.

Mrs. Price screamed. "The Cure! If you get that much liquor in his system, it will kill him!" She rocked the rag doll in her arms, trying to soothe it, and stared in horror.

Infield hit the big man behind the ear. He dropped the bottle and fell over sideways on the floor. Fear and hate mingled in his eyes as he looked up at Infield.

Nonsense, Infield told himself. Eyes can't register emotion.

Davies released his lines and drew them in. He got up precariously. "I'm going to kill you," he said, glaring at Infield. "You made me fall worse than Georgie did. I'm really going to kill you."

Infield wasn't a large man, but he had pressed two hundred and fifty many times in gym. He grabbed Davies' belt with both hands and lifted him about six inches off the floor.

"I could drop you," the psychiatrist said.

"No!" Davies begged weakly. "Please!"

"I'll do it if you cause more trouble." Infield sat down and rubbed his aching forearms.

DAVIES backed off in terror, right into the arms of Reggie. The waiter closed his huge hands on the acrophobe's shoulders.

"*You* broke the Code all the way," Reggie said. "The Good Book says 'Thou shouldn't kill' or something like that, and so does the Code."

"Let him go, Reggie," Price choked out, getting to his feet. "I'm not dead." He wiped his hand across his mouth.

"No. No, you aren't." Infield felt an excitement pounding through him, same as when he had diagnosed his first case. No, better than that.

"That taste of liquor didn't kill you, Price. Nothing terrible happened. You could find some way to get rid of that Cure."

Price stared at him as if he were a padded-cell case. "That's different. I'd be a hopeless drunk without the Cure. Besides, no one ever gets rid of a Cure."

They were all looking at Infield. Somehow he felt this represented a critical point in history. It was up to him which turn the world took, the world as represented by these four Cured people. "I'm afraid I'm for *less* Cures instead of more, Price.

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Look, if I can show you that someone can discard a Cure, would you get rid of that — if I may use the word — *monstrous* thing on your head?"

Price grinned. Infield didn't recognize its smugness at the time.

"I'll show you." He took off the circlet with the lightning rod and yanked at the wire running down into his collar. The new-old excitement within was running high. He felt the wire snap and come up easily. He threw the Cure on the floor.

"Now," he said, "I am going out in that rain storm. There's thunder and lightning out there. I'm afraid, but I can get along without a Cure and so can you."

"You can't! Nobody can!" Price screamed after him. He turned to the others. "If he reveals us, the Cause is lost. We've got to stop him *for good*. We've got to go after him."

"It's slippery," Davies whimpered. "I might fall."

Mrs. Price cuddled her rag doll. "I can't leave the baby and she mustn't get wet."

"Well, there's no liquor out there and you can study your text in the lightning flashes, Reggie. Come on."

RUNNING down the streets that were tunnels of shining tar, running into the knifing ice bristles of the rain, Henry Infield realized that he was very frightened of the lightning.

There is no action without a reason, he knew from the old neglected books. He had had a latent fear of lightning when he chose the lightning rod Cure. He could have picked a safety belt or foetic gyro just as well.

He sneezed. He was soaked through, but he kept on running. He didn't know what Price and Reggie planned to do when they caught him. He slipped and fell. He would soon find out what they wanted. The excitement was all gone now and it left an empty space into which fear rushed.

Reggie said, "We shall make a sacrifice."

Infield looked up and saw the lightning reflected on the blade of a thin knife. Infield reached toward it more in fascination than fear. He managed to get all his fingers around two of Reggie's. He jerked and the knife fell into Infield's palm. The psychiatrist pulled himself erect by holding to Reggie's arm. Staggering to his feet, he remembered what he must do and slashed at the waiter's head. A gash streaked across the man's brow and blood poured into his eyes. He screamed. "I can't see the words!"

It was his problem. Infield usually solved other people's problems, but now he ran away— he couldn't even solve his own.

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Infield realized that he had gone mad as he held the thin blade high overhead, but he did need some kind of lightning rod. Price (who was right behind him, gaining) had been right. No one could discard a Cure. He watched the lightning play its light on the blade of his Cure and he knew that Price was going to kill him in the next moment.

He was wrong.

The lightning hit him first.

REGGIE squinted under the bandage at the lettering on the door that said INFIELD & MORGAN and opened the door. He ran across the room to the man sitting at the desk, reading by the swivel light.

"Mr. Morgan, your partner, Mr. Infield, he — "

"Just a moment." Morgan switched on the room lights. "What were you saying?"

"Mr. Infield went out without his Cure in a storm and was struck by lightning. We took him to the morgue. He must have been crazy to go out without his Cure."

Morgan stared into his bright desk light without blinking. "This is quite a shock to me. Would you mind leaving? I'll come over to your place and you can tell me about it later."

Reggie went out. "Yes, sir. He was struck by lightning, struck dead. He must have been crazy to leave his Cure . . . " The door closed.

Morgan exhaled. Poor Infield. But it wasn't the lightning that killed him, of course. Morgan adjusted the soundproofing plugs in his ears, thinking that you did have to have quite a bit of light to read lips. The thunder, naturally, was what had killed Infield. Loud noise — any noise — that would do it every time. Too bad Infield had never really stopped being one of the Incompletes. Dangerous people. He would have to deal with them.

— JIM HARMON

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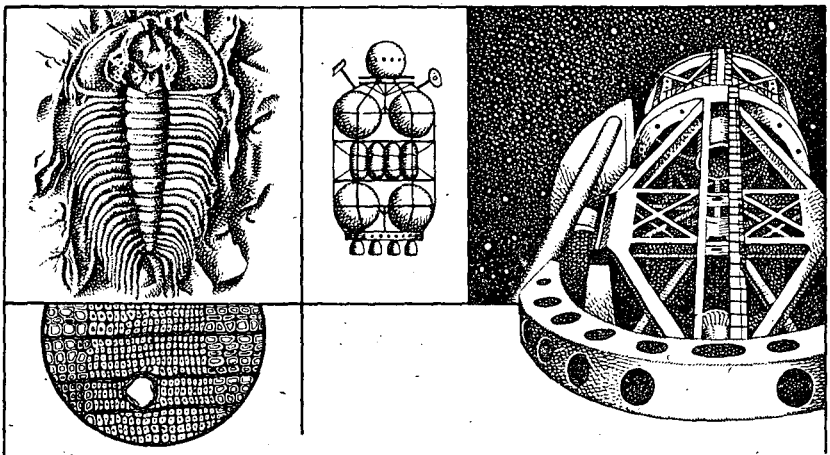

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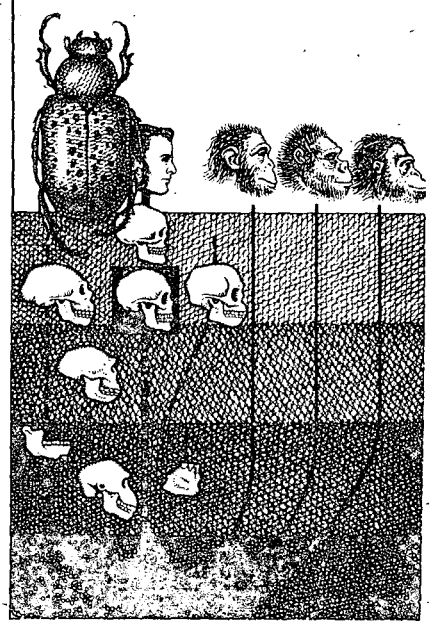

By WILLY LEY

WANTED — DEAD OR ALIVE

THOUGH STORIES of scientific discoveries never repeat precisely, they often have such a pronounced pattern that, in reading one story, one thinks that it is a retelling of another and it can happen that the mind is lulled into a kind of carelessness by the similarities and experiences a surprise when things suddenly take a different turn. As a case in point, I offer the stories of two "scientific" fishes. One event is

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rather old, having occurred in the period from 1870 to 1895. The other is recent, so recent that it is, in fact, still current.

The first story began with the fact that a man was tired of farming. He was William Forster, who had owned a farm near the Burnett River in Queensland, Australia, for a number of years, but had retired and moved to Sydney. One day in 1869, he decided to pass the time at the Sydney Museum. There he saw specimens of all the unusual animals of Australia with which he was familiar. But there was something missing and he fell to talking about it with Gerard Krefft, the curator of the museum. Mr. Forster asked why the museum did not show the big fish that lived in the Burnett River.

GERARD KREFFT admitted that he did not know anything about a big fish in the Burnett River, but thought it quite likely that the museum might have specimens — not yet on exhibit, possibly—from other localities. He asked Forster to describe it and Forster did his best.

The fish was around five feet long and greenish in color, with a white belly, and had unusually large scales. It did not have a tail like other fish but more like an eel. Come to think of it, the shape of the body was also like that of an eel, a very fat eel, about as thick as a man's thigh. And it had four strong fins. Mr. Forster was certain about that, even though Mr. Keffrt had never heard about a fish with only four fins.

Forster added that the fish was edible. The white squatters in the area actually called it the Burnett salmon, while the natives had a name like *barramundi.* (In that Mr. Forster was wrong. The natives did have a name for the fish he had in mind, but it was *dyelleh. Barramundi* was the native name for an entirely different fish.)

The discussion ended with a promise by Mr. Forster to write to his cousin, who had taken over the farm, and ask him to send a few Burnett salmon to Mr. Krefft.

Early in 1870, a barrel arrived at the museum. It contained several Burnett salmon, strongly salted as a preservative against the heat of the southern-hemisphere summer. Curator Krefft pulled one of the specimens from the barrels and hefted it onto a table; the Burnett salmon proved to be a heavyweight.

He saw that William Forster had delivered a rather good description of the external characteristics. An expert would have done better only by attaching the proper technical terms to some of the external appendages. He

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would have called the pointed fringe of fin material around the rear end a Diphyceral Tail (pronounced with capitals out of respect for its rarity) and he would have emphasized that the four fins were living examples of an up to that moment only theoretical concept, namely the *archipterygium* of Professor Karl Gegenbauer.

It was, in short, a limb which could evolve into a fish's fin or else could become an amphibian's leg.

Krefft then looked into the mouth of the creature and stated later that he did not believe his eyes. There were very few but very large teeth in this mouth, each one looking as if a set of teeth had grown together, and reminding the onlooker of the comb of a rooster.

Such teeth had been known as fossils, but nobody had been quite sure which kind of early fish had grown them; general suspicion centered around an ancient shark. The extinct fish to which these teeth once belonged had been called *Ceratodus*, or "horn-tooth." Now it was clear that it had not been a shark.

When Krefft dissected the fish, he found that, in addition to the normal gills, it also had a single lung. It was the fish that got into all the books as the Australian Lungfish, a veritable living fossil from the Middle Age of fish history.

KREFFT WAS so overwhelmed by the find that he did not even think it proper to give it another scientific name than the one attached to the fossil. He called it *Ceratodus Forsteri*, adding, as is customary, his own name.

Since then, pretty complete specimens of the fossil Ceratodus have been found. It turned out that the fossils of several hundred million years ago and the living form were not quite the same, so the Latin word for "new" was tacked on in front of the name and it became *Neoceratodus Forsteri* Krefft.

What had to be done next was to investigate the living fossil in the living state. Two one-man expeditions set out for the Burnett River to do just that. One consisted of Professor Spencer of Melbourne, who just spent his vacation on the project. The other one was Professor Richard Semon of Jena, Germany, who had traveled half-way around the Earth for the purpose, backed by the money of the Swiss manufacturer Karl Ritter.

Professor Semon, a direct pupil of Ernst Haeckel, was successful where Spencer was not, simply because *Neoceratodus* steadfastly refused to lay eggs

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until after Professor Spencer's vacation was over. But Professor Semon's studies were interrupted, too, one day. No more eggs, no more fish within reach. The reason? The natives had eaten them!

Professor Semon had to wait for a full year—which he spent on islands between Australia and New Zealand—until the mating time of *Neoceratodus* came round again. Then, with natives who had been very strongly warned against eating the fish, he offered what to them were enormous rewards for bringing in the fish, and especially the eggs, alive. Observing the development of an individual lungfish from its egg would shed much light on the evolution of the species in the past.

It had been obvious all along that the lungfishes — there are three: one in South America, one in Africa and one in Australia, the Australian form being the largest and the most typical — were somewhere near the point where, in the distant past, the marine vertebrates, the fishes, had gone on land to become amphibians. But what had gone before? Where did the lungfishes fit in with the other fishes?

Mostly with the aid of fossils, the story could be reconstructed. The earliest known fishes, from the late Silurian and early Devonian period of 350 million years ago, were a strange lot. They were small, just a few inches long. Their organ of locomotion was their tail exclusively for there were no other fins. They also had no jaws and consequently no teeth. But they were heavily armored, with plate armor in front and scales over the tail section. Their main and possibly only enemy must have been the gigantic sea scorpions (eurypterids) of the same time, which were a good ten feet in length. No living representative of this type is left.

BUT SOME of these early fishes managed to become something else, presumably by leaving the river and going into the open sea. They developed jaws and paired fins and lost their armor, and speed became their protective device. We all know this type: the selachians, sharks in everyday English.

That they were an inherently successful development is shown by the fact that they are still with us, although the bad reputation of a few of them has confused the picture. The number of surviving species of sharks (and of rays, which are also selachians) is small and the number of individuals, too. Moreover, with a very few exceptions, the living forms are all rather recent types.

Above the sharks, we get two

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main lines. One of them constitutes the endless multitudes of the living true, or bony, fishes. Another line led through an intermediary group to the first amphibians; the lungfishes are a group which branched off this intermediary group. They were near, but not in, the line of evolution of the amphibians and managed to survive mostly by being able to endure conditions which neither true fishes nor amphibians could tolerate.

The name of the intermediary group from which both the lungfishes and the amphibians came is crossopterygians. In English, this is translated as "lobe-fins." The Germans are more careful when it comes to the translation of the Greek word *krossoi* and call them *Quastenflosser* or "tassel-fins." An especially vigorously flourishing tribe of the lobe-fins were the coelacanths ("hollow spines") with large heads, strong, almost limblike, fins and a curious double tail. They started later in the Devonian period, lived through the Carboniferous and the Permian periods and all through the three periods of the great reptiles, Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous, but becoming rarer and rarer as time went on. They petered out near the end of the Cretaceous period and the last of the crossopterygians was *Macropoma Mantelli.*

It so happened that Macropoma was the first fossil of a crossopterygian ever discovered. Sir Arthur Smith Woodward carefully reconstructed it.

MY SECOND fish story begins by reporting that a river called Chalumna empties into the ocean on the southeast coast of Africa, near a town called East London. Late in 1938, a trawler with a load of fish berthed in New London. Its captain phoned the curator of the local museum, Miss M. Courtnay Latimer, told her that he had caught a very curious fish, and maybe she would like to come to the wharf to look at it. Miss Latimer did and saw at first glance that, whatever it was, it was very curious, just as the captain had said.

There was an unwieldy fish with an enormous head, steel blue in color, with large blue eyes, large scales and peculiar fins. It was a little over five feet in length and, though the captain of the trawler did not know its name, he did know its weight: 127 pounds. He also remembered details of the catch.

It had been caught not very far offshore on December 22nd, 1938, with a trawler net — other contents: one and a half tons of shark and half a ton of redfish and kobs—in 40 fathoms of water. It had lived for three hours

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after capture and had tried to bite the hand of the captain as he bent over to see whether it was alive.

The trawler captain had termed it a very curious fish. Miss Latimer spoke of it as a very primitive fish when she informed Dr. James Leonard Brierley Smith, ichthyologist at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

Dr. Smith hurried to East London, but meanwhile nature had taken its course. The trawler had not returned to shore immediately after this catch. Miss Latimer probably wrote at once, but time went by between her first look at the fish and Dr. Smith's arrival. And it was summer in the southern hemisphere. Miss Latimer had been forced to order the fish skinned and the skin mounted. She did save the skull, too, and the rest had to be thrown away.

But although all the internal and interesting parts were missing, Dr. Smith saw that *it was a coelacanth!*

To honor Miss Latimer, who had saved what could be saved, he called it Latimeria and wrote down, for the journal *The Cape Naturalist*, the precise classification: Class: Pisces; Subclass: Crossopterygii; Order: Actinistia; Family: Coelacanthidae; Genus: *Latimeria*; Species: *chalumnae*, and added: "the genus and the species are new to science."

This was one of those major understatements which are occasionally made by people who want to avoid being called enthusiastic, for it was the biggest discovery in the whole natural history field since the finding of *Neoceratodus.*

A live brontosaurus in Lake Victoria would have been more spectacular, of course, but of lesser scientific interest. It certainly would have involved us, the observers, less because *Latimeria chalumnae* J. L. B. Smith is a representative of what constituted our own ancestry and a brontosaurus is not.

BUT THEN came a period of long frustration, for the Second World War was on. Fishing for food continued as usual, but the specimen off the mouth of the Chalumna River was evidently a stray.

It is said that Dr. Smith, during the war years, asked his wife in the middle of the night, "Do you think Latimeria lives in the Mozambique Channel?" (the water separating Madagascar from Africa) and I, for one, am inclined to believe this story; I have done similar things myself. Life would have been much easier for Dr. Smith if he had known where Latimeria lived. Since he

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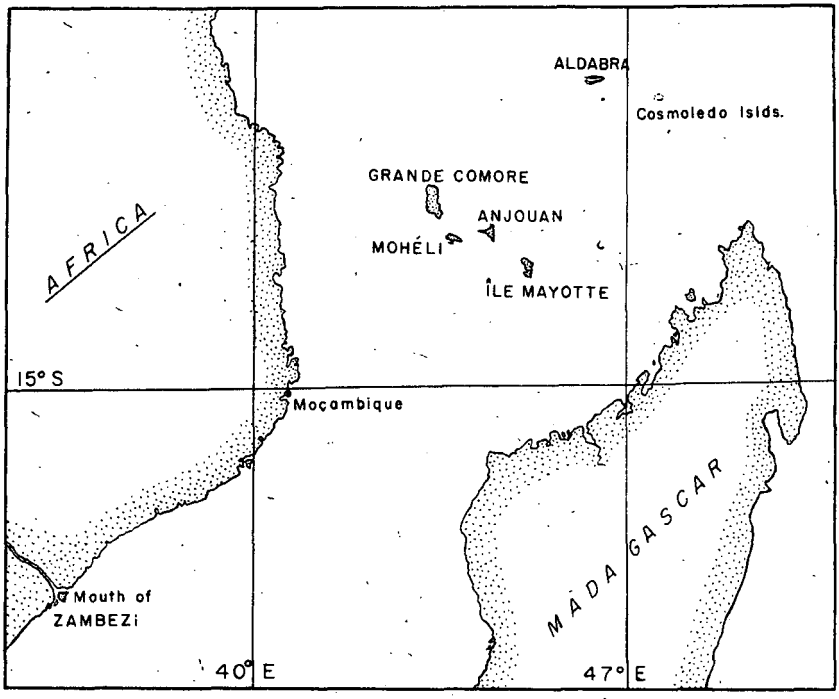

Area of distribution of the living coelocanths, the sea between the mainland of Africa and the northern tip of Madagascar.

didn't, he had to consider an enormous area.

The three languages spoken on the coastline of Africa are, going from south to north: English, Portuguese and French. Dr. Smith had pamphlets printed in large numbers in these three languages, offering a reward of £100 for a specimen.

He made collecting trips himself and, in December, 1952, had just come to Durban Harbor, South Africa, with many specimens of other fish, when he received a message from a trader plying the ocean between the African mainland and the Comores Islands: Grande Comore, Mohéli, Anjouan and Mayotte. Trader Eric Hunt reported that he had a second specimen!

Dr. Smith, worried that it might decay like the first before he got there, telephoned Daniel F. Malan, the Prime Minister of

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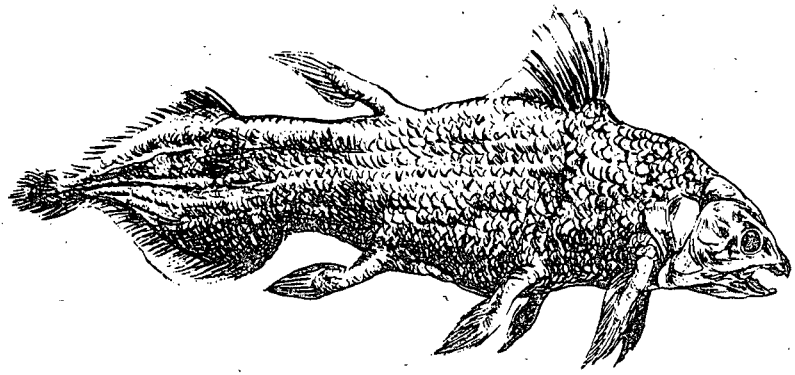

The living coelacanth, Latimeria Chalumnae Smith.

the Union of South Africa, pleading for an airplane and pilot.

Prime Minister Malan is a champion of *Apaartheid* (segregation) and thinks that evolution is a question of belief instead of knowledge. Moreover, the telephone call arrived at midnight, when he was asleep.

In spite of all this, Dr. Smith won his point—the Prime Minister ordered at once that a Dakota plane (DC-3) and a military pilot be placed at Dr. Smith's disposition. He was flown to Trader Hunt's ship. High emotional strain and lack of sleep combined to put Dr. Smith's nerves on edge; when he saw the wrapped fish on board the small ship, he had to ask others to remove the wrappings for him. There was a large blue coelacanth with large blue eyes, with catlike teeth in its jaws—and it was undecayed!

Dr. Smith knelt down on the deck and wept.

SPECIMEN NO. 2 had been caught by a native, Ahmed Hussein, 200 yards off the island of Anjouan in 65 feet of water. The fish had struggled so hard that Ahmed Hussein had to bash its head in. The next morning, he took it to market, but before somebody else of equal ignorance bought it for soup, another native recognized it as the fish which was worth three years of normal income. The lucky fisherman and his canny informant lugged the fish over 25 miles of mountainous terrain to Trader Hunt's vessel.

Hunt, who had been handing out Dr. Smith's leaflets himself, sent a cable to the scientist, then sliced open the fish's sides and packed them with salt. After that,

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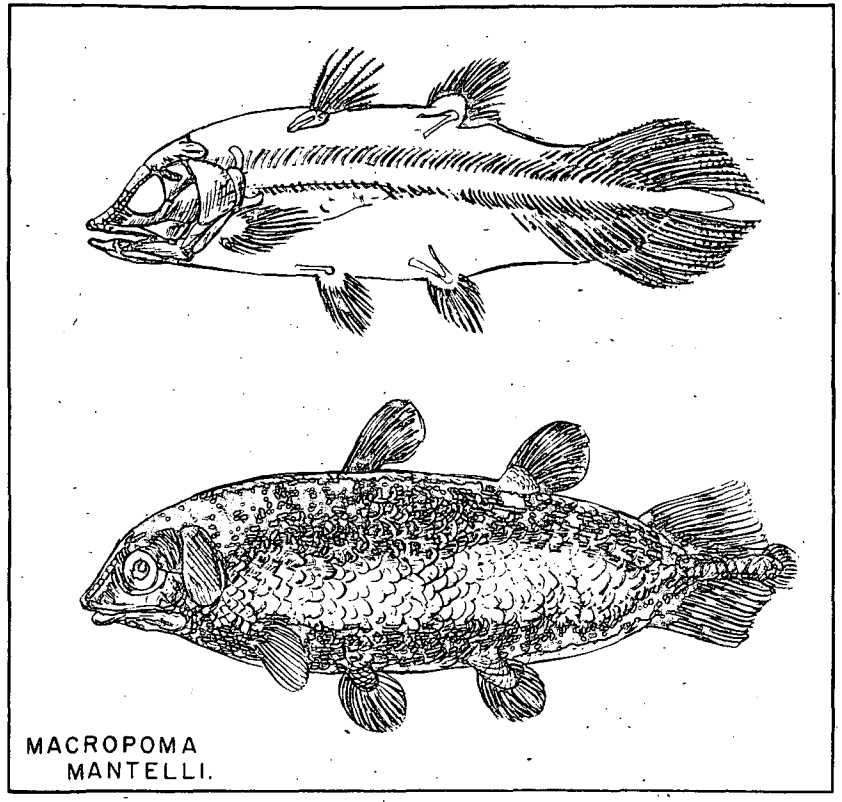

The most recent fossil coelacanth, restoration of skeleton (above) and of external appearance (below). The restorations were made before the living coelacanth was discovered.

he found a medical officer, borrowed a syringe and five liters of formalin and injected them into the fish.

Dr. Smith now had the material to decide the two questions most important from the scientific standpoint: How were the jaws formed? And had the coelacanths progressed to the point of having livers?

En passant, he collected some information from the natives of the Comores Islands. They all knew the fish, which was brought to market occasionally. Their

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own name for it was *combessa*. Its flesh turned into jelly when it was boiled. And, when alive, its eyes were luminous.

After examining Specimen No. 2 some more, Dr. Smith felt that this was a different species from No. 1. And so it happened that the anti-evolutionist Prime Minister had this fish named after him — it became *Malania anjouanae*, "Malan's fish from Anjouan."

Science did not have to wait for another dozen years for Specimen No. 3. It was killed by Houmadi Hassani off Anjouan in 650 feet of water on September 24, 1953. It was a smaller fish, weighing only 88 pounds, and it was brown with white spots. Because of this coloration, Houmadi Hassani's assertion that he had *the* fish was not believed at first, but a few hours after death, it turned blue.

It was flown in an old Junkers plane to Madagascar, for in the meantime, Professor James Millot in Paris had informed French officialdom about the scientific rarity in French waters, since both the Comores and Madagascar are French possessions. In fact, Professor Millot was waiting in Madagascar; he was not going to miss a chance to have a go at the next specimen that showed up. And he soon made a few scientific pronouncements.

The coelacanth apparently showed a very unusual amount of individual variation, in coloration as well as in placements of the fins. Hence Dr. Smith's new species, based on such minor differences, was unfounded. They were all *Latimeria chalumnae*.

Specimen No. 4 was taken near Grande Comore, the main island of the group, on January 29, 1954. In the morning of January 30th, Specimen No. 5 was brought in and, a few hours later, Specimen No. 6. But there was a wait of ten months for No. 7.

The scientists, especially the French, were overjoyed with the development, but they mourned one fact. One couldn't be sure about the very first specimen because so little of it was left, but all the others had been males.

AS IN the case of *Neoceratodus*, the scientific desire for fish eggs grew to outrageous proportions. Furthermore, six good specimens were enough to learn all about the anatomy of this survivor from the period preceding the so-called Age of Reptiles. Now one had to observe the live fish if one wanted more information.

The French had matched Dr. Smith's reward of one hundred pounds sterling all along and had paid it to the lucky fishermen — with public ceremonies. Now

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they doubled the prize, but it had to be a live specimen to rate the bigger award.

Specimen No. 8 was brought in on November 12, 1954, by two fishermen, Zema ben Said Mohamed and Madi Bacari. The fish struck at a depth of 840 feet and it took more than half an hour to haul it in. Specimen No. 8 was brought in alive and turned out to be a female.

There was dancing all night in the village. The specimen was put in a swamped boat resting on the bottom in very shallow water and a fish net was stretched over the boat so that the catch could not escape. And anybody could see that the natives had told the truth all along: the eyes of the fish glowed strongly with a greenish-yellow light. The color of the live specimen was a very dark gray-blue. As it swam slowly about in its confined space, the pectoral fins made "curious rotating movements," to use Professor Millot's words.

Millot continued: ". . . the second dorsal and anal fins, likewise very mobile, served together with the tail as a rudder. After daybreak it became apparent that the light, and above all the sun itself, was upsetting the animal very much, so several tent canvases were put over the boat to serve as some kind of protection. But despite this precaution and the more or less constant renewal of the water, the fish began to show more and more obvious signs of distress, seeking to conceal itself in the darkest corners . . . at 14:45 hr. it was still swimming feebly; but at 15:30 hr. it had its belly in the air and only the fins and gill covers were making agonized movements."

Specimen No. 8, four feet and nearly eight inches long and weighing almost precisely 90 pounds, had lived for about 20 hours, counting from the moment of its striking the baited hook. Unfortunately, the fish did not carry any eggs. But quoting Millot once more:

"Two principal conclusions emerge from the corroborated statements made by local observers and myself: (1) the extreme photophobia of *Latimeria* — the sunlight seemed literally to hurt it; (2) the exceptional mobility of the pecundulate fins, correlated with the wealth of musculature which is revealed by anatomical studies. The pectorals, in particular, can move in almost any direction and show themselves capable of assuming practically every conceivable position."

BECAUSE OF the sensitivity to sunlight, an "aquarium" for *Latimeria* will probably have to take the shape of a wire-net cage at the bottom of the sea,

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at least 200 feet below the surface, which can be lifted to, say, 30 feet from time to time to enable scientists in aqualungs to study the fish and take photographs.

Professor Millot has promised that "all about *Latimeria*" will be told in a four-volume work now in preparation. But the last volume of this work will certainly not be sent to the printer until a few more things have been done.

One is to observe mating and spawning, if at all possible. If that does not work out, the scientists want to have at least one bunch of eggs which can be hatched and a few young will then be killed off for careful dissection at intervals of a few days. Richard Semon did that with *Neoceratodus* eggs.

The comparison between the two should be most interesting and enlightening. Since the young in their early stages always resemble their ancestors, such a study may teach us just where *Latimeria* ties in with fossil forms and possibly even enable us to arrange the fossil forms in an evolutionary sequence.

Another observation that would be of the greatest interest would be to find where the fish actually lives. The first specimen was evidently a stray, because all the others were taken in the vicinity of the Comores Islands — usually, but not always, in fairly deep water. If one could establish where the fish lives, it could be a clue for its survival in just this area. If they prefer caves it might also be that the biggest specimen stay in their caves.

The first one, weighing 127 pounds, is also the largest one so far. Most of the others weighed 100 pounds or less. But the natives swear that in the past, when nobody yet cared, specimens weighing 225 pounds were brought to market once in a while.

Finally, it is not established that the fish lives only near the Comores Islands. It has not yet been found near the Cosmoledo Islands, or near the Seychelles Islands, some distance to the northeast from the Cosmoledos. On the other hand, nobody has been strenuously looking around these islands and we have seen that, in spite of strenuous looking, many years passed between Specimen No. 1 and No. 2.

Moreover, such living fossils have a habit of surviving in widely separated areas, a fact that can be easily explained. Originally they had a worldwide distribution and then managed to hang on in a few places, becoming extinct in the in-between areas.

Marsupials, for example, survived mainly in Australia. But they also live in the Americas.

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ANOTHER LIVING fossil, just as old as *Latimeria* and *Neoceratodus*, the horseshoe crab survives along the Atlantic shores of the United States. The only other place it can be found is in the waters around the Moluccas on the other side of the Earth. The point I'm leading up to is that there is a little bit of very feeble evidence for a primitive fish of large size in the Gulf of Mexico.

In 1949, a woman in or near Tampa, Florida, ran a small shop selling souvenirs to tourists. She made many of them herself and her raw material consisted often of fish scales, which she bought from local fishermen. One day in 1949, a fisherman sold her a gallon can full of scales. They had the same size as the scales of a large tarpon—about that of a silver dollar—but they looked different.

Being curious, she mailed one of the scales to the National Museum in Washington, D. C., where it was passed on to the fish expert, Dr. Isaac Ginsburg. Dr. Ginsburg knew several things instantly:

One: he had never seen such a scale before. Two: no fish with such scales was known to live in the Gulf of Mexico. Three: there had never been even a rumor of a large unknown fish from those waters. Finally: the fish which grew this scale was a very primitive type, possibly a crossopterygian.

He at once wrote to Tampa requesting information on the whereabouts of more scales, the place where the fisherman had been fishing, the appearance of the fish from which the scales were taken. He never received a reply.

Nothing is known, therefore, except that there must be something unusual in the Gulf. We may get still a third fish story of the type of the two just told, right in our own waters.

— WILLY LEY

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A Coffin for

With never a moment to rest, the pursuit through space felt like a game of hounds and hares . . . or was it follow the leader?

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Jacob

By EDWARD W. LUDWIG

Illustrated by EMSH

BEN CURTIS eased his pale, gaunt body through the open doorway of the Blast Inn, the dead man following silently behind him.

His fear-borne gaze traveled into the dimly illumined Venusian gin mill. The place was like an evil caldron steaming with a brew whose ingredients had been culled from the back corners of three planets.

Most of the big room lay obscured behind a shimmering veil of tobacco smoke and the sweet, heavy fumes of Martian Devil's Egg. Here and there, Ben saw moving figures. He could not tell if they were Earthmen, Martians or Venusians.

Someone tugged at his greasy coat. He jumped, thinking absurdly that it was the dead man's hand.

"Coma esta, senor?" a small

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voice piped. *"Speken die Deutsch? Desirez-vous d'amour? Da? Nyet?"*

Ben looked down.

The speaker was an eager-eyed Martian boy of about ten. He was like a red-skinned marionette with pipestem arms and legs, clad in a torn skivvy shirt and faded blue dungarees.

"I'm American," Ben muttered.

"Ah, *buena!* I speak English *tres* fine, *senor.* I have Martian friend, she *tres* pretty and *tres* fat. She weigh almost eighty pounds, *monsieur.* I take you to her, *si?*"

Ben shook his head.

HE THOUGHT, *I don't want your Martian wench. I don't want your opium or your Devil's Egg or your Venusian kali. But if you had a drug that'd bring a dead man to life, I'd buy and pay with my soul.*

"It is deal, *monsieur?* Five dollars or twenty *keelis* for visit Martian friend. Maybe you like House of Dreams. For House of Dreams—"

"I'm not buying."

The dirty-faced kid shrugged. "Then I show you to good table, — *tres bien.* I do not charge you, *senor.*"

The boy grabbed his hand. Because Ben could think of no reason for resisting, he followed. They plunged into shifting layers of smoke and through the drone of alcohol-cracked voices.

They passed the bar with its line of lean-featured, slit-eyed Earthmen — merchant spacemen.

They wormed down a narrow aisle flanked by booths carved from Venusian marble that jutted up into the semi-darkness like fog-blanketed tombstones.

Several times, Ben glimpsed the bulky figures of CO_2-breathing Venusians, the first he'd ever seen.

They were smoky gray, scaly, naked giants, toads in human shape. They stood solitary and motionless, aloof, their green-lidded eyes unblinking. They certainly didn't look like telepaths, as Ben had heard they were, but the thought sent a fresh rivulet of fear down his spine.

Once he spied a white-uniformed officer of Hoover City's Security Police. The man was striding down an aisle, idly tapping his neuro-club against the stone booths.

Keep walking, Ben told himself. *You look the same as anyone else here. Keep walking. Look straight ahead.*

The officer passed. Ben breathed easier.

"Here we are, *monsieur,*" piped the Martian boy. "A *tres* fine table. Close in the shadows."

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Ben winced. How did this kid know he wanted to sit in the shadows? Frowning, he sat down — he and the dead man.

He listened to the lonely rhythms of the four-piece Martian orchestra.

The Martians were fragile, doll-like creatures with heads too large for their spindly bodies. Their long fingers played upon the strings of their *cirillas* or crawled over the holes of their flutes like spider legs. Their tune was sad. Even when they played an Earth tune, it still seemed a song of old Mars, charged with echoes of lost voices and forgotten grandeur.

For an instant, Ben's mind rose above the haunting vision of the dead man. He thought, *What are they doing here, these Martians? Here, in a smoke-filled room under a metalite dome on a dust-covered world? Couldn't they have played their music on Mars? Or had they, like me, felt the challenge of new worlds?*

He sobered. It didn't matter. He ordered a whiskey from a Chinese waiter. He wet his lips but did not drink. His gaze wandered over the faces of the Inn's other occupants.

You've got to find him, he thought. *You've got to find the man with the red beard. It's the only way you can escape the dead man.*

THE DEAD man was real. His name was Cobb. He was stout and flabby and about forty and he hated spacemen.

His body was buried now — probably in the silent gray wastes outside Luna City. But he'd become a kind of invisible Siamese twin, as much a part of Ben as sight in his eyes.

Sometimes the image would be shuffling drunkenly beside him, its lips spitting whiskey-slurred curses.

Again, its face would be a pop-eyed mask of surprise as Ben's fist thudded into its jaw. More often, the face would be frozen in the whiteness of death. The large eyes would stare. Blood would trickle from a corner of the gaping mouth.

You can forget a living man. You can defeat him or submit to him or ignore him, and the matter is over and done. You can't escape from a memory that has burned into your mind.

It had begun a week ago in Luna City. The flight from White Sands had been successful. Ben, quietly and moderately, wanted to celebrate. He stopped alone in a rocketfront bar for a beer. The man named Cobb plopped his portly and unsteady posterior on the stool next to him.

"Spacemen," he muttered, "are getting like flies. Everywhere, all you see's spacemen."

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He was a neatly dressed civilian.

Ben smiled. "If it weren't for spacemen, you wouldn't be here."

"The name's Cobb." The man hiccoughed. "Spacemen in their white monkey suits. They think they're little tin gods. Betcha you think you're a little tin god." He downed a shot of whiskey.

Ben stiffened. He was twenty-four and dressed in the white, crimson-braided uniform of the *Odyssey's* junior astrogation officer. He was three months out of the Academy at White Sands and the shining uniform was like a key to all the mysteries of the Universe.

He'd sought long for that key.

AT THE age of five—perhaps in order to dull the memory of his parents' death in a recent strato-jet crash — he'd spent hours watching the night sky for streaking flame-tails of Moon rockets. At ten, he'd ground his first telescope. At fourteen, he'd converted an abandoned shed on the government boarding-school grounds to a retreat which housed his collection of astronomy and rocketry books.

At sixteen, he'd spent every weekend holiday hitchhiking from Boys Town No. 5 in the Catskills to Long Island Spaceport. There, among the grizzled veterans of the old Moon Patrol, he'd found friends who understood his dream and who later recommended his appointment to the U. S. Academy for the Conquest of Space.

And a month ago, he'd signed aboard the *Odyssey* — the first ship, it was rumored, equipped to venture as far as the asteroids and perhaps beyond.

Cobb was persistent: "Damn fools shoulda known enough to stay on Earth. What the hell good is it, jumpin' from planet to planet?"

The guy's drunk, Ben thought. He took his drink and moved three stools down the bar.

Cobb followed. "You don't like the truth, eh, kid? You don't like people to call you a sucker."

Ben rose and started to leave the bar, but Cobb grabbed his arm and held him there.

"Thas what you are—a sucker. You're young now. Wait ten years. You'll be dyin' of radiation rot or a meteor'll get you. Wait and see, sucker!"

Until this instant, Ben had suppressed his anger. Now, suddenly and without warning, it welled up into savage fury.

His fist struck the man on the chin. Cobb's eyes gaped in shocked horror. He spun backward. His head cracked sickeningly on the edge of the bar. The sound was like a punctuation mark signaling the end of life.

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He sank to the floor, eyes glassy, blood tricking down his jaw.

Ben knew that he was dead.

Then, for a single absurd second, Ben was seized with terror — just as, a moment before, he'd been overwhelmed with anger.

He ran.

FOR SOME twenty minutes, he raced through a dizzying, nightmare world of dark rocketfront alleys and shouting voices and pursuing feet.

At last, abruptly, he realized that he was alone and in silence. He saw that he was still on the rocketfront, but in the Tycho-ward side of the city.

He huddled in a dark corner of a loading platform and lit a cigarette. A thousand stars — a thousand motionless balls of silver fire — shone above him through Luna City's transparent dome.

He was sorry he'd hit Cobb, of course. He was not sorry he'd run. Escaping at least gave him a power of choice, of decision.

You can do two things, he thought.

You can give yourself up, and that's what a good officer would do. That would eliminate the escape charge. You'd get off with voluntary manslaughter. Under interplanetary law, that would mean ten years in prison and a dishonorable discharge. And then you'd be free.

But you'd be through with rockets and space. They don't want new men over thirty-four for officers on rockets or even for third-class jet-men on beat-up freighters — they don't want convicted killers. You'd get the rest of the thrill of conquering space through video and by peeking through electric fences of spaceports.

Or —

There were old wives' tales of a group of renegade spacemen who operated from the Solar System's frontiers. The spacemen weren't outlaws. They were misfits, rejectees from the clearing houses on Earth.

And whereas no legally recognized ship had ventured past Mars, the souped-up renegade rigs had supposedly hit the asteroids. Their headquarters was Venus. Their leader —a subject of popular and fantastic conjecture in the men's audiozines — wash r u m o r e d to be a red-bearded giant.

So, Ben reflected, *you can take a beer-and-pretzels tale seriously. You can hide for a couple of days, get rid of your uniform, change your name. You can wait for a chance to get to Venus. To hell with your duty. You can try to stay in space, even if you exile yourself from Earth.*

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After all, was it right for a single second, a single insignificant second, to destroy a man's life and his dream?

HE WAS lucky. He found a tramp freighter whose skipper was on his last flight before retirement. Discipline was lax, investigation of new personnel even more so.

Ben Curtis made it to Venus.

There was just one flaw in his decision. He hadn't realized that the memory of the dead man's face would haunt him, torment him, follow him as constantly as breath flowed into his lungs.

But might not the rumble of atomic engines drown the murmuring dead voice? Might not the vision of alien worlds and infinite spaceways obscure the dead face?

So now he sat searching for a perhaps nonexistent red-bearded giant, and hoping and doubting and fearing, all at once.

"You look for someone, *senor?*"

He jumped. "Oh. You still here?"

"Oui." The Martian kid grinned, his mouth full of purple teeth. "I keep you company on your first night in Hoover City, *n'est-ce-pas?"*

"This isn't my first night here," Ben lied. "I've been around a while."

"You are spacemen?"

Ben threw a fifty-cent credit piece on the table. "Here. Take off, will you?"

Spiderlike fingers swept down upon the coin. *"Ich danke, senor.* You know why city is called Hoover City?"

Ben didn't answer.

"They say it is because after women come, they want first thing a thousand vacuum cleaners for dust. What is vacuum cleaner, *monsieur?"*

Ben raised his hand as if to strike the boy.

"Ai-yee, I go. You keep listen to good Martian music."

The toothpick of a body melted into the semi-darkness.

Minutes passed. There were two more whiskeys. A ceaseless parade of faces broke through the smoky veil that enclosed him — reddish balloon faces, scaly reptilian faces, white-skinned, slit-eyed faces, and occasionally a white, rouged, powdered face. But nowhere was there a face with a red beard.

A sense of hopelessness gripped Ben Curtis. Hoover City was but one of a dozen cities of Venus. Each had twenty dives such as this.

He needed help.

But his picture must have been 'scoped to Venusian visiscreens. A reward must have been offered for his capture. Whom could he trust? The Martian kid, perhaps?

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Far down the darkened aisle nearest him, his eyes caught a flash of white. He tensed.

Like the uniform of a Security Policeman, he thought.

His gaze shifted to another aisle and another hint of whiteness.

And then he saw another and another and another.

Each whiteness became brighter and closer, like shrinking spokes of a wheel with Ben as their focal point.

You idiot! The damned Martian kid! You should have known!

LIGHT SHOWERED the room in a dazzling explosion. Ben, half blinded, realized that a broad circle of unshaded globes in the ceiling had been turned on.

The light washed away the room's strangeness and its air of brooding wickedness, revealing drab concrete walls and a debris-strewn floor.

Eyes blinked and squinted. There were swift, frightened movements and a chorus of angry murmurs. The patrons of the Blast Inn were like tatter-clad occupants of a house whose walls have been ripped away.

Ben Curtis twisted his lean body erect. His chair tumbled backward, falling.

The white-clad men charged, neuro-clubs upraised.

A woman screamed. The music ceased. The Martian orchestra slunk with feline stealth to a rear exit. Only the giant Venusians remained undisturbed. They stood unmoving, their staring eyes shifting lazily in Ben's direction.

"Curtis!" one of the policemen yelled. "You're covered! Hold it!"

Ben whirled away from the advancing police, made for the exit into which the musicians had disappeared.

A hissing sound traveled past his left ear, a sound like compressed air escaping from a container. A dime-sized section of the concrete wall ahead of him crumbled.

He stumbled forward. They were using deadly neuro-pistols now, not the mildly stunning neuro-clubs.

Another hiss passed his cheek. He was about twelve feet from the exit. *Another second,* his brain screamed. *Just another second —*

Or would the exits be guarded?

He heard the hiss.

It hit directly in the small of his back. There was no pain, just a slight pricking sensation, like the shallow jab of a needle.

HE FROZE as if yanked to a stop by a noose. His body seemed to be growing, swelling into balloon proportions. He knew that the tiny needle had imbedded itself deep in his flesh, knew that the paralyzing morto-

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cain was spreading like icy fire into every fiber and muscle of his body.

He staggered like a man of stone moving in slow motion. He'd have fifteen — maybe twenty — seconds before complete lethargy of mind and body overpowered him.

In the dark world beyond his fading consciousness, he heard a voice yell, "Turn on the damn lights!"

Then a pressure and a coldness were on his left hand. He realized that someone had seized it.

A soft feminine voice spoke to him. "You're wounded? They hit you?"

"Yes." His thick lips wouldn't let go of the word.

"You want to escape — even now?"

"Yes."

"You may die if you don't give yourself up."

"No, no."

He tried to stumble toward the exit.

"All right then. Not that way. Here, this way."

Heavy footsteps thudded toward them. A few yards away, a flashlight flicked on.

Hands were guiding him. He was aware of being pushed and pulled. A door closed behind him. The glare of the flashlight faded from his vision — if he still had vision.

"You're sure?" the voice persisted.

"I'm sure," Ben managed to say.

"I have no antidote. You may die."

His mind fought to comprehend. With the anti-paralysis injection, massage and rest, a man could recover from the effects of mortocain within half a day. Without treatment, the paralysis could spread to heart and lungs. It could become a paralysis of death. An effective weapon: the slightest wound compelled the average criminal to surrender at once.

"Anti . . . anti . . ." The words were as heavy as blobs of mercury forced from his throat. "No . . . I'm sure . . . sure."

He didn't hear the answer or anything else.

BEN CURTIS had no precise sensation of awakening. Return to consciousness was an intangible evolution from a world of black nothingness to a dream-like state of awareness.

He felt the pressure of hands on his naked arms and shoulders, hands that massaged, manipulated, fought to restore circulation and sensitivity. He knew they were strong hands. Their strength seemed to transfer itself to his own body.

For a long time, he tried to

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open his eyes. His lids felt welded shut. But after a while, they opened. His world of darkness gave way to a translucent cloak of mist. A round, featureless shape hovered constantly above him — a face, he supposed.

He tried to talk. Although his lips moved slightly, the only sound was a deep, staccato grunting.

But he heard someone say, "Don't try to talk." It was the same gentle voice he'd heard in the Blast Inn. "Don't talk. Just lie still and rest. Everything'll be all right."

Everything all right, he thought dimly.

There were long periods of lethargy when he was aware of nothing. There were periods of light and of darkness. Gradually he grew aware of things. He realized that the soft rubber mouth of a spaceman's oxygen mask was clamped over his nose. He felt the heat of electric blankets swathed about his body. Occasionally a tube would be in his mouth and he would taste liquid food and feel a pleasant warmth in his stomach.

Always, it seemed, the face was above him, floating in the obscuring mist. Always, it seemed, the soft voice was echoing in his ears:

"Swallow this now. That's it. You must have food." Or, "Close your eyes. Don't strain. It won't be long. You're getting better."

Better, he'd think. *Getting better...*

At last, after one of the periods of lethargy, his eyes opened. The mist brightened, then dissolved.

He beheld the cracked, unpainted ceiling of a small room, its colorless walls broken with a single, round window. He saw the footboard of his aluminite bed and the outlines of his feet beneath a faded blanket.

Finally he saw the face and figure that stood at his side.

"You are better?" the kind voice asked.

THE FACE was that of a girl probably somewhere between twenty-five and thirty. Her features, devoid of makeup, had an unhealthy-looking pallor, as if she hadn't used a sunlamp for many weeks. Yet, at the same time, her firm slim body suggested a solidity and a strength. Her straight brown hair was combed backward, tight upon her scalp, and drawn together in a knot at the nape of her neck.

"I — I am better," he murmured. His words were still slow and thick. "I am going to live?"

"You will live."

He thought for a moment. "How long have I been here?"

"Nine days."

"You took care of me?" He noted the deep, dark circles be-

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neath her sleep-robbed eyes.

She nodded.

"You're the one who carried me when I was shot?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Suddenly he began to cough. Breath came hard. She held the oxygen mask in readiness. He shook his head, not wanting it.

"Why?" he asked again.

"It would be a long story. Perhaps I'll tell you tomorrow."

A new thought, cloaked in sudden fear, entered his murky consciousness. "Tell me, will — will I be well again? Will I be able to walk?"

He lay back then, panting, exhausted.

"You have nothing to worry about," the girl said softly. Her cool hand touched his hot forehead. "Rest. We'll talk later."

His eyes closed and breath came easier. He slept.

When he next awoke, his gaze turned first to the window. There was light outside, but he had no way of knowing if this was morning, noon or afternoon — or on what planet.

He saw no white-domed buildings of Hoover City, no formal lines of green-treed parks, no streams of buzzing gyro-cars. There was only a translucent and infinite whiteness. It was as if the window were set on the edge of the Universe overlooking a solemn, silent and matterless void.

The girl entered the room.

"Hi," she said, smiling. The dark half-moons under her eyes were less prominent. Her face was relaxed.

She increased the pressure in his rubberex pillows and helped him rise to a sitting position.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"Venus."

"We're not in Hoover City?"

"No."

He looked at her, wondering. "You won't tell me?"

"Not yet. Later, perhaps."

"Then how did you get me here? How did we escape from the Inn?"

SHE SHRUGGED. "We have friends who can be bribed. A hiding place in the city, the use of a small desert-taxi, a pass to leave the city — these can be had for a price."

"You'll tell me your name?"

"Maggie."

"Why did you save me?"

Her eyes twinkled mischievously. "Because you're a good astrogator."

His own eyes widened. "How did you know that?"

She sat on a plain chair beside his bed. "I know everything about you, Lieutenant Curtis."

"How did you learn my name? I destroyed all my papers — "

"I know that you're twenty-

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four. Born July 10, 1971. Orphaned at four, you attended Boys Town in the Catskills till you were 19. You graduated from the Academy at White Sands last June with a major in Astrogation. Your rating for the five-year period was 3.8 — the second highest in a class of fifty-seven. Your only low mark in the five years was a 3.2 in History of Martian Civilization. Want me to go on?"

Fascinated, Ben nodded.

"You were accepted as junior astrogation officer aboard the *Odyssey*. You did well on your flight from Roswell to Luna City. In a barroom fight in Luna City, you struck and killed a man named Arthur Cobb, a pre-fab salesman. You've been charged with second degree murder and escape. A reward of 5,000 credits has been offered for your capture. You came to Hoover City in the hope of finding a renegade group of spacemen who operate beyond Mars. You were looking for them in the Blast Inn."

He gaped incredulously, struggling to rise from his pillows. "I — don't get it."

"There are ways of finding out what we want to know. As I told you, we have many friends."

He fell back into his pillows, breathing hard. She rose quickly.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I shouldn't have told you yet. I felt so happy because you're alive. Rest now. We'll talk again soon."

"Maggie, you — you said I'd live. You didn't say I'd be able to walk again."

She lowered her gaze. "I hope you'll be able to."

"But you don't think I will, do you?"

"I don't know. We'll try walking tomorrow. Don't think about it now. Rest."

He tried to relax, but his mind was a vortex of conjecture.

"Just one more question," he almost whispered.

"Yes?"

"The man I killed — did he have a wife?"

She hesitated. He thought, *Damn it, of all the questions, why did I ask that?*

Finally she said, "He had a wife."

"Children?"

"Two. I don't know their ages."

She left the room.

HE SANK into the softness of his bed. As he turned over on his side, his gaze fell upon an object on a bureau in a far corner of the room.

He sat straight up, his chest heaving.

The object was a tri-dimensional photo of a rock-faced man in a merchant spaceman's uniform. He was a giant of a man with a neatly trimmed *red beard!*

Ben stared at the photo for a

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long time. At length, he slipped into restless sleep. Images of faces and echoes of words spun through his brain.

The dead man returned to him. Bloodied lips cursed at him. Glassy eyes accused him. Somewhere were two lost children crying in the night.

And towering above him was a red-bearded man whose great hands reached down and beckoned to him. Ben crawled through the night on hands and knees, his legs numb and useless. The crying of the children was a chilling wail in his ears.

His head rose and turned to the red-bearded man. His pleading voice screamed out to him in a thick, harsh cackle. Yet even as he screamed, the giant disappeared, to be replaced by white-booted feet stomping relentlessly toward him.

He awoke still screaming . . .

A night without darkness passed. Ben lay waiting for Maggie's return, a question already formed in his mind.

She came and at once he asked, "Who is the man with the red beard?"

She smiled. "I was right then when I gave you that thumbnail biog. You *were* looking for him, weren't you?"

"Who is he?"

She sat on the chair beside him.

"My husband," she said softly.

He began to understand. "And your husband needs an astrogator? That's why you saved me?"

"We need all the good men we can get."

"Where is he?"

She cocked her head in mock suspicion. "Somewhere between Mercury and Pluto. He's building a new base for us — and a home for me. When his ship returns, I'll be going to him."

"Why aren't you with him now?"

"He said unexplored space is no place for a woman. So I've been studying criminal reports and photos from the Interplanetary Bureau of Investigation and trying to find recruits like yourself. You know how we operate?"

He told her the tales he'd heard.

SHE NODDED. "There are quite a few of us now — about a thousand — and a dozen ships. Our base used to be here on Venus, down toward the Pole. The dome we're in now was designed and built by us a few years ago after we got pushed off Mars. We lost a few men in the construction, but with almost every advance in space, someone dies.

"Venus is getting too civilized. We're moving out and this dome is only a temporary base when we have cases like yours. The new

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base — I might as well tell you it's going to be an asteroid. I won't say which one.

"Don't get the idea that we're outlaws. Sure, about half our group is wanted by the Bureau, but we make honest livings. We're just people like yourself and Jacob."

"Jacob? Your husband?"

She laughed. "Makes you think of a Biblical character, doesn't it? Jacob's anything but that. And just plain 'Jake' reminds one of a grizzled old uranium prospector and he isn't like that, either."

She lit a cigarette. "Anyway, the wanted ones stay out beyond the frontiers. Jacob and those like him can never return to Earth — not even to Hoover City — except dead. The others are physical or psycho rejects who couldn't get clearance if they went back to Earth. They know nothing but rocketing and won't give up. They bring in our ships to frontier ports like Hoover City to unload cargo and take on supplies."

"Don't the authorities object?"

"Not very strongly. The I. B. I. has too many problems right here to search the whole System for a few two-bit crooks. Besides, we carry cargoes of almost pure uranium and tungsten and all the stuff that's scarce on Earth and Mars and Venus. Nobody really cares whether it comes from the asteroids or Hades. If we want to risk our lives mining it, that's our business."

She pursed her lips. "But if they guessed how strong we are or that we have friends planted in the I. B. I. — well, things might be different. There probably would be a crackdown."

Ben scowled. "What happens if there *is* a crackdown? And what will you do when Space Corps ships officially reach the asteroids? They can't ignore you then."

"Then we move on. We dream up new gimmicks for our crates and take them to Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto. In time, maybe, we'll be pushed out of the System itself. Maybe it won't be the white-suited boys who'll make that first hop to the stars. It *could* be us, you know — if we live long enough. But that Asteroid Belt is murder. You can't follow the textbook rules of astrogation out there. You make up your own."

BEN STIFFENED. "And that's why you want me for an astrogator."

Maggie rose, her eyes wistful. "If you want to come—and if you get well." She looked at him strangely.

"Suppose—" He fought to find the right words. "Suppose I got well and decided not to join Jacob. What would happen to me? Would you let me go?"

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Her thin face was criss-crossed by emotion—alarm, then bewilderment, then fear. "I don't know. That would be up to Jacob."

He lay biting his lip, staring at the photo of Jacob. She touched his hand and it seemed that sadness now dominated the flurry of emotion that had coursed through her.

"The only thing that matters, really," she murmured, "is your walking again. We'll try this afternoon. Okay?"

"Okay," he said.

When she left, his eyes were still turned toward Jacob's photo.

He was like two people, he thought.

Half of him was an officer of the Space Corps. Perhaps one single starry-eyed boy out of ten thousand was lucky enough to reach that goal.

He remembered a little picture book his mother had given him when she was alive. Under the bright pictures of spacemen were the captions:

"A Space Officer Is Honest." "A Space Officer Is Loyal." "A Space Officer Is Dutiful."

Honesty, loyalty, duty. Trite words, but without those concepts, mankind would never have broken away from the planet that held it prisoner for half a million years.

Without them, Everson, after three failures and a hundred men dead, would never have landed on the Moon twenty-seven years ago.

BEN SIGHED. He had a debt to pay. A good officer would pay that debt. He'd surrender and take his punishment. He'd rip the crimson braid from his uniform. He'd prevent the Academy for the Conquest of Space from being labeled the school of a murderer and a coward.

And by doing these things, the haunting image of a dead man would disappear from his vision.

But the other half of Ben Curtis was the boy who'd stood trembling beneath a night sky of beckoning stars.

The eyes in Jacob's photo seemed to be staring at the boy in him, not at the officer. They appeared both pleading and hopeful. They were like echoes of cold, barren worlds and limitless space, of lurking and savage death. They held the terror of loneliness and of exile, of constant flight and hiding.

But, too, they represented a strength that could fulfill a boy's dream, that could carry a man to new frontiers. They, rather than the neat white uniform, now offered the key to shining miracles. That key was what Ben wanted.

But he asked himself, as he had a thousand times, "If I follow Jacob, can I leave the dead man behind?"

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He tried to stretch his legs and he cursed their numbness. He smiled grimly. For a moment, he'd forgotten. How futile now to think of stars!

What if he were to be like this always? Jacob would not want a man with dead legs. Jacob would either send him back to Earth or—Ben shuddered—see that he was otherwise disposed of. And disposal would be the easier course.

THIS WAS the crisis. He sat on the side of the bed, Maggie before him, her strong arm about his waist.

"Afraid?" she asked.

"Afraid," he repeated, shaking.

It was as if all time had been funneled into this instant, as if this moment lay at the very vortex of all a man's living and desiring. There was no room in Ben's mind for thoughts of Jacob now.

"You can walk," Maggie said confidently. "I *know* you can."

He moved his toes, ankles, legs. He began to rise, slowly, falteringly. The firm pressure around his waist increased.

He stood erect. His legs felt like tree stumps, but here and there were a tingling and a warmth, a sensitivity.

"Can you make it to the window?" Maggie asked.

"No, no, not that far."

"Try! Please try!"

She guided him forward.

His feet shuffled. Stomp, stomp. The pressure left his waist. Maggie stepped away, walked to the window, turned back toward him.

He halted, swaying. "Not alone," he mouthed fearfully. "I can't get there by myself."

"Of course you can!" Maggie's voice contained unexpected impatience.

Ashamed, he forced his feet to move. At times, he thought he was going to crash to the floor. He lumbered on, hesitating, fighting to retain his balance. Maggie waited tensely, as if ready to leap to his side.

Then his eyes turned straight ahead to the window. This was the first time he'd actually seen the arid, dust-cloaked plains of the second planet. He straightened, face aglow, as though a small-boy enthusiasm had been reborn in him.

His tree-stump legs carried him to the window. He raised shaking hands against the thick glassite pane.

Outside, the swirling white dust was omnipresent and unchallenged. It cut smooth the surfaces of dust-veiled rocks. It clung to the squat desert shrubbery, to the tall skeletal shapes of Venusian needle-plants and to the swish-tailed lizards that skittered beneath them.

The shrill of wind, audible

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through the glassite, was like the anguished complaint of the planet itself, like the wail of an entity imprisoned in a dark tomb of dust. Venus was a planet of fury, eternally howling its wrath at beings isolated from sunlight and greenery, from the clean blackness of space and the warm glow of sister-planet and star.

The dust covered all, absorbed all, eradicated all. The dust was master. The dome, Ben felt, was as transitory as a tear-drop of fragile glass falling down, down, to crash upon stone.

"Is it always like this?" he asked. "Doesn't the wind ever stop?"

"Sometimes the wind dies. Sometimes, at night, you can see the lights from the city."

HE KEPT staring. The dome, he thought, was a symbol of Man's littleness in a hostile universe.

But, too, it was a symbol of his courage and defiance. And perhaps Man's greatest strength lay in the very audacity that drove him to build such domes.

"You like it, don't you?" Maggie asked. "It's lonely and ugly and wild, but you like it."

He nodded, breathless.

She murmured, "Jacob used to say it isn't the strange sights that thrill spacemen—it's the thoughts that the sights inspire."

He nodded again, still staring.

She began to laugh. Softly at first, then more loudly. It was the kind of laughter that is close to crying.

"You've been standing there for ten minutes! You're going to walk again! You're going to be well!"

He turned to her, smiling with the joyous realization that he had actually stood that long without being aware of it.

Then his smile died.

Standing behind Maggie, in an open doorway, was a gray, scaly, toadlike monster — a six-and-a-half-foot Venusian. He was motionless as a statue, his green-lidded eyes staring curiously at Ben. His scaly hand was tight about the butt of an old-fashioned heat pistol holstered to his hip.

Maggie suppressed a smile. "Don't be frightened, Ben. This is Simon—Simple Simon, we call him. His I. Q. isn't too high, but he makes a good helper and guard for me. He's been so anxious to see you, but I thought it'd be better if he waited until you were well."

Ben nodded, fascinated by the apparent muscular solidity of the creature. It hadn't occurred to his numbed mind that he and Maggie were not the sole occupants of the dome.

But Maggie had acted wisely, he thought. His nightmares had

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been terrifying enough without bringing Simple Simon into them.

"Shake hands with Ben," she told the Venusian.

Simple Simon lumbered forward, then paused. His eyes blinked. "No," he grated.

Maggie gasped. "Why, Simple Simon, what's the matter?"

The gray creature rasped, "Ben —he not one of us. He thinks— different. In thoughts—thinks escape. Earth."

MAGGIE PALED. "He *is* one of us, Simon." She stepped forward and seized the Venusian's arm. "You go to your room. Stand guard. You guard Ben just like you guard me. Understand?"

Simple Simon grunted, "I guard. If Ben go—I stop him. I stop him good." He raised his huge hands suggestively.

"No, Simon! Remember what Jacob told you. We hurt no one. Ben is our friend. You help him!"

The Venusian thought for a long moment. Then he nodded. "I help Ben. But if go—stop."

She led the creature out of the room and closed the door.

"Whew," Ben sighed. "I'd heard those fellows were telepaths. Now I *know*."

Maggie's trembling hands reached for a cigarette. "I—I guess I didn't think, Ben. Venusians can't really read your mind, but they see your feelings, your emotions. It's a logical evolutionary development, I suppose. Auditory and visual communication are difficult here, so evolution turned to empathy. And that's why Jacob keeps a few Venusians in our group. They can detect any feeling of disloyalty before it becomes serious."

Ben remembered Simple Simon's icy gaze and the way his rough hand had gripped his heat pistol. "They could be dangerous."

"Not really. They're as loyal as Earth dogs to their masters. I mean they wouldn't be dangerous to anyone who's loyal to us."

Silently, she helped him back to his bed.

"I'm sorry, Maggie—sorry I haven't decided yet."

She neither answered nor looked at him.

Grimly, he realized that his status had changed. He was no longer a patient; he was a prisoner.

A Venusian day passed, and a Venusian night. The dust swirled and wind blew, as constant as the whirl of indecision in Ben's mind.

Maggie was patient. Once, when she caught him gazing at Jacob's photo, she asked, "Not yet?"

He looked away. "Not yet."

HE LEARNED that the little dome consisted of three rooms, each shaped like pieces

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of a fluffy pie with narrow concrete hallways between.

His room served as a bedroom and he discovered that Maggie slept on a pneumatic cot in the kitchen. The third room, opening into the airlock, housed a small hydroponics garden, sunlamp, short-wave visi-radio, and such emergency equipment as oxygen tanks, windsuits, and vita-rations. It was here that Simple Simon remained most of the time, tending the garden or peering into the viewscreen that revealed the terrain outside the dome.

Maggie prepared Ben's meals, bringing them to him on a tray until he was able to sit at a table. As his paralysis diminished, he helped her with cooking—with Simple Simon standing by as a mute, motionless observer.

Occassionally Maggie would talk of her girlhood in a small town in Missouri and how she'd dreamed of journeying to the stars.

"'Stars are for boys,' they'd tell me, but I was a queer one. While other gals were dressing for their junior proms, I'd be in sloppy slacks down at the spaceport with Jacob."

She laughed often—perhaps in a deliberate attempt to disguise the omnipresent tension. And her laughter was like laughter on Earth, floating through comfortable houses and over green fields and through clear blue sky. When she laughed, she possessed a beauty.

Despite her pale face and lack of makeup, Ben realized that she was no older than he.

If I'd only known her back on Earth, he thought. *If I—* And then he told himself, *You've got enough problems. Don't create another one!*

Finally, except for a stiffness in his leg joints, he'd fully recovered.

"How much time do I have?" he asked.

"Before you decide?"

"Yes."

"Very little. Jacob's ship is on its way. It'll be here—well, you can't tell about these things. Two or three Earth days, maybe even tomorrow. It'll stay in Hoover City long enough to discharge and load cargo. Then it'll stop here for us and return to—to our new base."

"What do you think Jacob would do if I didn't want to go with him?"

SHE SHOOK her head. "You asked me that before. I said I didn't know."

Ben thought, *I know a lot about you, Jacob. I know you're based on an asteroid. I know how many men you have, how many ships. I know where this dome is. I know you have men planted in*

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the I. B. I. Would you let me go, knowing these things? How great is your immunity from the law? Do you love freedom so much that you'd kill to help preserve it?

Fear crawled through his mind on icy legs.

"Maggie," he said, "what would Jacob do if he were me?"

She looked amused. "Jacob wouldn't have gotten into your situation. He wouldn't have struck Cobb. Jacob is—"

"A man? And I'm still a boy? Is that what you mean?"

"Not exactly. I think you'll be a man after you make your decision."

He frowned, not liking her answer.

"You think the dream of going into space is a boy's dream, that it can't belong to a man, too?"

"Oh, no. Jacob still has the dream. Most of our men do. And in a man, it's even more wonderful than in a boy." Then her face became more serious. "Ben, you've got to decide soon. And it's got to be a *complete* decision. You can have no doubt in your mind."

He nodded. "On account of Simon, you mean."

She motioned for him to come to the window in his room. He gazed outward, following the line of her finger as she pointed.

He saw a man-sized mound of stones, dimly visible beneath the wind-whipped dust.

A grave.

"He was a man like you," Maggie said softly. "God knows Simon didn't *try* to kill him. But he was escaping. He—he made the decision not to join us. Simon sensed it. There was a struggle. Simon's hands—well, he doesn't realize—"

She didn't have to explain further. Ben knew what those mighty scaly paws could do.

THE MOMENTS were now like bits of eternity cloaked in frozen fear. Somewhere in the blackness of interplanetary space, Jacob's rocket was streaking closer and closer to Venus. How far away was it? A million miles? Fifty thousand? Or was it now—right now—ripping through the murky Venusian atmosphere above the dome?

A *complete* decision, Maggie had said.

Jacob didn't want a potential deserter in his group. And you couldn't *pretend* that you were loyal to Jacob—not with monstrosities like Simple Simon about.

Soon Jacob, not Ben, might have to make a decision—a decision that could result in a second cairn of stones on the wind-swept desert.

Ben shivered.

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Before retiring, he wandered nervously into the supply room. Maggie was poised over the visiradio. Simple Simon was intently scanning the night-shrouded terrain in the viewscreen.

"Any news?" Ben asked Maggie.

The girl grunted negatively without looking up.

Ben's gaze fell upon the array of oxygen masks, windsuits, vitarations. Then, on a littered shelf, he spied a small Venusian compass.

Almost automatically, his hand closed over it. His brain stirred with a single thought: *A compass could keep a man traveling in a straight line.*

Simple Simon restlessly shifted. He turned to Ben, blinking in the frighteningly alien equivalent of a suspicious scowl.

Ben's hand tightened about the compass. He tried to relax, to force all thought of it from his mind. He stared at the viewscreen, concentrating on the ceaseless drift of dust.

The Venusian's eyes studied him curiously, as if searching his mind for the illusive echo of a feeling that had given him alarm.

"I think I'll turn in," yawned Ben. "'Night, Maggie.

Simon frowned, apparently frustrated in his mental search. "Ben—not one of us. I—watch."

WITHOUT ANSWERING, Ben returned to his room, the compass hot and moist from the perspiration in his hand.

He took a deep breath.

Why had he taken the compass? He wasn't sure. Perhaps, he reflected, his decision had already been made, deep beneath the surface of consciousness.

He stood before the window, peering into the night. He knew that to attempt to sleep was futile. Sleep, for the past few days an ever-ready friend, had become a hostile stranger.

God, his brain cried, *what shall I do?*

Slowly, the dust outside the window settled. The scream of wind was no longer audible. His startled eyes beheld dim, faraway lights—those of Hoover City, he guessed.

It was as if, for the space of a few seconds, some cosmic power had silenced the Venusian fury, had guided him toward making his decision.

He whipped up his compass. He barely had time to complete the measurement.

"Sixty-eight degrees," he read. "Northeast by east."

Fresh wind descended onto the plain. Dancing dust erased the vision of the lights.

"Sixty-eight, sixty-eight," he kept muttering.

But now there was nothing to

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do—except try to sleep and be ready.

Strong hands shook him out of restless sleep. He opened his eyes and saw complete darkness. He thought at first that his eyesight had failed.

"Ben! Wake up!" Maggie's voice came to him, crisp, commanding. "The rocket's coming. I've decoded the message. We only have a few minutes."

The girl snapped on a small bulkhead light. She left him alone to dress.

He slid out of bed, a drowsiness still in him. He reached for his clothing. Abruptly, the full implication of what she had said struck him.

Jacob's rocket was coming. This was the time for decision, yet within his taut body there was only a jungle of conflicting impulses.

MAGGIE RETURNED, her face hard, her eyes asking the silent question.

Ben stood frozen. The slow seconds beat against his brain like waves of ice.

At last she said, "Ready, Ben?" She spoke evenly, but her searching gaze belied the all-important significance of her words.

In the dim light, the photograph of Jacob was indistinguishable, but Ben could still see the image of the dead man.

He thought, *I can't run away with Jacob like a selfish, cowardly kid! No matter how bright the stars would be, that brightness couldn't destroy the image of a dead man with staring eyes. No matter what Jacob and Simon do to me, I've got to try to get back to Earth.*

He suddenly felt clean inside. He was no longer ashamed to hold his head high.

"Maggie," he said.

"Yes?"

"I've made my decision."

Outside the window, a waterfall of flame cascaded onto the desert, pushing aside the dust and the darkness. The deep-throated sound of rocket engines grumbled above the whining wind. The floor of the dome vibrated.

"The rocket's here!" Maggie cried.

The flaming exhaust from the ship dissolved into the night. The rocket thunder faded into the wind.

The alarm on the dome's inner airlock bulkhead rang. Maggie ran like a happy child through the concrete corridor, Ben following. She bounded into the supply room, pushed Simple Simon aside, stopped before a control panel. Her fingers flew over switches and levers.

The airlock door slid open. A short, stubble-bearded man clad in windsuit and transparalite hel-

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met stomped in. He unscrewed the face plate of his helmet. His ears were too big and he looked like a fat doll.

"We're ready for you, Mrs. Pierce," he said.

Maggie nodded eagerly. She whirled back to Ben. "*Hurry!* Get your helmet and suit on!"

She spun back to the big-eared little man. "Cargo unloaded? All set for the flight home?"

Home, Ben thought. *She calls a place she's never seen home.*

"Cargo's unloaded."

"No trouble with the I. B. I.? No investigation?"

"Not yet. We're good for a few more hauls, I guess."

BEN SLIPPED on his windsuit. He glanced at the control panel for the airlock. Yes, he could manipulate it easily. He contemplated the heat pistol at Simple Simon's hip. A tempting idea—but, no, he wanted no more of violence.

Then he bit his lip. He cleared his mind of all thought.

Simple Simon evidently had not noted the impulse that flicked his adrenals into pumping.

The big-eared man stared strangely at Maggie. "Mrs. Pierce, before we go, I'd better tell you something."

"You can do that on the rocket."

Maggie stepped forward to seize her helmet. The man blocked her movement.

"Mrs. Pierce, your husband—Jacob—was on the rocket."

"What?" The girl released a broken, unbelieving little laugh. "Why, he wouldn't dare! That idiot, taking a chance like—" Alarm twisted her features. "He—he wasn't captured—"

"No, he wasn't captured. And he took no chance, Mrs. Pierce."

A moment of silence. Then she sucked in her breath.

Ben understood. Words echoed in his mind: "Jacob and those like him can never return to Earth, not even to Hoover City—except dead."

Maggie swayed. Ben and the big-eared little man jumped to her side, guided her back into the compartment used as a kitchen. They helped her to a chair. Ben turned on the fire beneath a coffee pot. Simple Simon watched silently.

Her eyes empty and staring, Maggie asked, "How did it happen?"

"We were heading into a clump of baby asteroids the size of peas. The radar warning was too slow. We couldn't pull away; we had to stop. The deceleration got him—crushed him. He lived for five minutes afterward."

The little man produced a folded paper from a pocket of his suit. "Jacob said he had some

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ideas he had to get down on paper. God knows why, but during those five minutes he drew up this plan for improving our deceleration compensator."

"Plans for—" she gasped.

"He was a spaceman, Mrs. Pierce." The man handed her the paper. Ben caught a glimpse of scribbled circuits, relays, cathodes.

"When he finished," the man continued, "he said to tell you that he loved you."

She started to hand the paper back.

The spaceman shook his head. "No, the original is yours. I've made copies for our own ships and for the brass in Hoover City."

MAGGIE KEPT talking to the little man, lost in the world he was creating for her. Ben was excluded from that world, a stranger.

Then Ben saw his opportunity.

Simple Simon's face was expressionless, but tears were zigzagging down his gray, reptilian features. Ben stared for several seconds, wondering if his vision had deceived him. Till this instant, he'd somehow assumed that the big Venusian was devoid of emotion.

But Simple Simon was crying.

It was unlikely that the creature would peer into his mind at a moment like this.

Step by step, Ben backed toward the open door in the rear of the compartment. Silently, he slipped through it. He attempted to move automatically, without feeling.

He darted into the supply room. The continued drone of voices told him his action had not been observed.

He didn't like it at all. Escaping this way was like crumpling Maggie's grief into an acid ball and hurling it into her face. But he had no other choice.

A few seconds later, he was dressed in windsuit and oxygen helmet. A can of vita-rations was strapped to his back and his compass was in his hand.

Heart refusing to stop pounding, he threw the levers and switches to open the airlock. He cringed under the grinding, scraping noise, as loud to him as the ringing clash of swords.

But the murmur of voices continued.

He stepped outside. The airlock door clanged shut. He was caught by the biting dust and the shrill banshee wind. He fell, then scrambled erect.

To his right, he saw the silver sheen of Jacob's rocket shining behind a row of golden, eyelike portholes. Beneath it were black outlines of moving, helmeted figures.

He bent low to study the luminous dial of his compass.

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Behind him was a grating and a sliding of metal. A movement in the darkness.

He turned.

Dimly illuminated by the glow from the rocket ports was the grim, stony face of Simple Simon.

THE VENUSIAN was like a piece of the night itself, compressed and solidified to form a living creature. The impression was contradicted only by the glowing whiteness of his eyes.

The reptilian body shuffled forward. The scales on his great face and chest reflected the lights from the rocket like Christmas tree ornaments dusted with gold.

His hands reached out.

Words thundered in Ben's memory: *God knows Simon didn't try to kill him. Simon's hands—well, he doesn't realize—*

Ben hopped away from the groping hands, slipped the compass into his pocket, balled his fists. The wind caught at his body. He stumbled, then recovered his balance.

Despite the wind and his suit's bulkiness, he was surprised at his own agility. He recalled that the gravitational pull of Venus was only four-fifths of Earth's. That was an advantage.

Crouching against the wind, he stepped to his left, away from the rocket. He was reluctant to enter an area of greater darkness, but neither did he want to risk observation by the men he'd seen near Jacob's ship.

Simple Simon followed. He moved like an automaton, functioning with awkward, methodical slowness. His hands, speckled with reflected light, rose up out of the darkness.

Ben stepped back, wiped the dust from his clouded face-plate. One swoop of those hands, he knew, could shatter his helmet, destroy his oxygen supply, leave him choking on deadly methane and carbon dioxide.

But, so far, Simon seemed bent on capture, not destruction. That fact gave Ben a second advantage.

Scaly fingers, moving now with greater swiftness, closed over the shoulder of his suit. Ben felt himself being pulled forward, a child in the grasp of a giant. His brief surge of confidence vanished. Cold terror swept upon him.

He lashed out wildly. His right fist found his target, found it so well that the skin split on his gloved knuckles.

Simon's head snapped back. The grasping fingers slipped from Ben's suit.

But still the Venusian lumbered ahead, an irresistible juggernaut, the hands continually groping. Ben ducked and slipped aside. The can of vita-rations was ripped from his back.

He crouched low, fighting the

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wind, maneuvering for another blow. His lungs ached, but he had no opportunity to increase his helmet's oxygen flow. His weak leg muscles were beginning to pain as though with needles of fire.

THE HANDS crashed down upon his shoulders. This time, his fist found Simon's stomach. The creature released a grunt audible above the howling of wind. His body doubled up.

Ben struck again and again. His lungs throbbed as if they'd break through his chest. A fresh layer of dust coated his face-plate, nearly blinding him. He fought instinctively, gauntleted fists battering.

Simple Simon fell.

Ben brushed away the dust from his face-plate, turned up his helmet's oxygen valve. Then he knelt by the fallen creature.

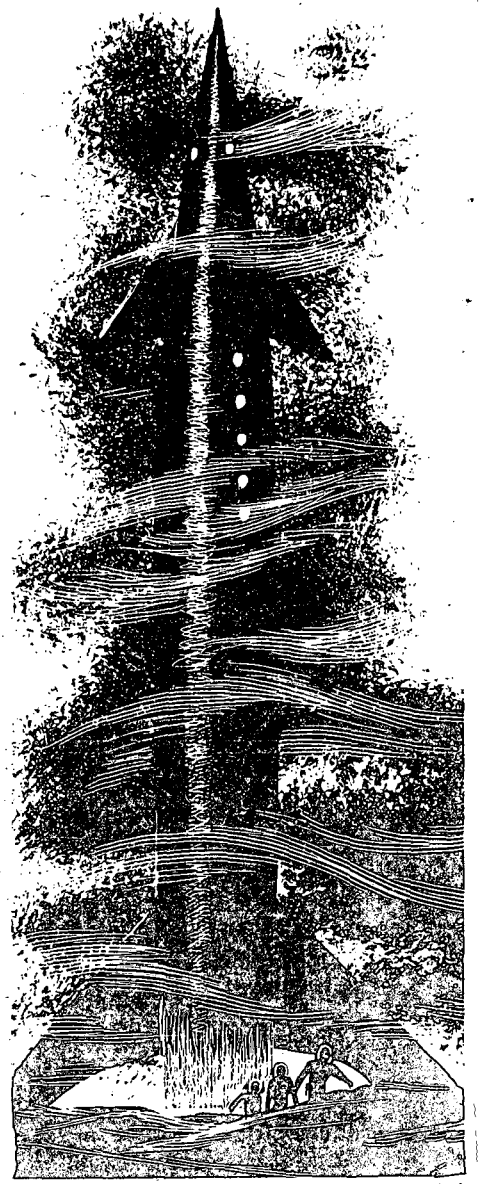
A new fear came to Ben Curtis —a fear almost as great as that of being caught in Simon's crushing grip. It was the fear that he had killed again.

But even in the near-darkness, he could distinguish the labored rise and fall of the massive chest.

Thank God, he thought.

From the direction of Jacob's ship, a flash of light caught his eye. The black shapes of helmeted men were becoming larger, nearer.

Ben tensed. The spacemen couldn't have heard sounds of



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the struggle, but they *might* have noticed movement.

Puffing, Ben plunged into the darkness to his left, slowing only long enough to consult the dial of his compass.

"Sixty-eight degrees," he breathed.

The compass dial was now his only companion and his only hope. It was the one bit of reality in a world of black, screaming nightmare.

AT FIRST Ben Curtis fought the wind and the dust and the night. His fists were clenched as they had been while struggling with Simon. Each step forward was a challenge, a struggle and—so far, at any rate—a victory.

But how far was the city? Five miles? Ten? How could you judge distance through a haze of alien sand?

And were Simple Simon or Jacob's men following? How good was a Venusian's vision at night? Would the scaly hands find him even now, descending on him from out of the blackness?

He kept walking, walking. Sixty-eight degrees.

Gradually his senses grew numb to the fear of recapture. He became oblivious to the wailing wind and the beat of dust against his face-plate. He moved like a robot. His mind wandered back through time and space, a pin-

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wheel spinning with unforgettable impressions, faces, voices.

He saw the white features of a dead man, their vividness fading now and no longer terrifying.

A Space Officer Is Honest. A Space Officer Is Loyal. A Space Officer Is Dutiful. The words were like clear, satisfying music.

He cursed at the image of a pop-eyed Martian boy. *A trés fine table, monsieur. Close in the shadows.*

And yet, he told himself, the boy really didn't do anything wrong. He was only helping to capture a murderer. Maybe he was lonesome for Mars and needed money to go home.

Ben thought of Maggie: *While other gals were dressing for their junior proms, I'd be in sloppy slacks down at the spaceport with Jacob . . . If I'd only known her back on Earth—*

Maggie, sitting alone now with a wrinkled paper and its mass of scrawled circuits. Alone and hollow with grief and needing help. Ben's throat tightened. Damn it, he didn't want to think about that.

What was it the little big-eared man had said? *I've made copies for our own ships and for the brass in Hoover City.*

Why had he said that? Why would renegades give their secrets to the Space Corps? The Corps would incorporate the discoveries in their ships. With them, they'd reach the asteroids. Jacob's group would be pushed even further outward.

Ben stopped, the wind whipping at his suit and buffeting his helmet—but not as hard as the answer he had found.

JACOB AND his men had an existence to justify, a debt to pay. They justified that existence and paid that debt by helping humanity in its starward advance.

Maggie had said, *We carry cargoes of almost pure uranium and tungsten and all the stuff that's getting scarce on Earth and Mars and Venus. If we want to risk our lives getting it, that's our business. . . . The dome we're in now was designed and built by us a few years ago. We lost a few men in the construction, but with almost every advance in space, someone dies.*

The wind pressed Ben back. The coldness of the Venusian night was seeping into his suit. It was as if his body were bathed, at once, in flame and ice.

He slipped, fell, his face turned toward the sandy ground. He did not try to rise.

Yet his mind seemed to soar above the pain, to carry him into a wondrous valley of new awareness.

Man would never be content to stay on nine insignificant globes—not when his eyes had

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the power to stare into a night sky and when his brain had the ability to imagine. There would have to be pioneers to seek out the unknown horror, to face it and defeat it. There would have to be signposts lining the great road and helping others to follow without fear.

For all the brilliancy of their dreams, those men would be the lonely ones, the men of no return. For all the glory of their brief adventure, they would give not only their cloaks, but ultimately their lives.

Ben lay trembling in the darkness.

His brain cried, *You couldn't rig up a radar system or a deceleration compensator, but you could chart those asteroids. You can't bring a man named Cobb back to life, but you could help a thousand men and women to stay alive five or ten or twenty years from now.*

Ben knew at last what decision Jacob would have made.

The reverse of sixty-eight on a compass is two-forty-eight.

LIKE FLASHING knitting needles, strong hands moved about his face-plate, his windsuit, his helmet. Then they were wiping perspiration from his white face and placing a wet cloth on the back of his neck.

"You were coming back," a voice kept saying. "You were coming back."

His mouth was full of hot coffee. He became aware of a gentle face hovering above him, just as it had a seeming eternity ago.

He sat up on the bed, conscious now of his surroundings.

"Simon says you were coming back, Ben. *Why?*"

He fought to grasp the meaning of Maggie's words. "Simon? Simon found me? He brought me back?"

"Only a short way. He said you were almost here."

Ben closed his eyes, reliving the whirlwind of thought that had whipped through his brain. He mumbled something about pioneers and a scrawled paper and a debt and a decision.

Then he blinked and saw that he and Maggie were not alone. Simple Simon stood at the foot of his bed—and was that a trace of a smile on his reptilian mouth? And three windsuited spacemen stood behind Maggie, helmets in their hands. One was a lean-boned, reddish-skinned Martian.

Simple Simon said, "Ben—changed. Thinks—like us. Good now. Like—Jacob."

The little big-eared man stepped up and shook hands with Ben. "If Simon says so, that's good enough for me."

A blond-haired Earthman helped Ben from the bed. "Legs okay,

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fellow? Think you're ready?"

Ben stood erect unassisted. "Legs okay. And I'm ready."

He thought for a moment. "But suppose I wasn't ready. Suppose I didn't want to go with you. I know a lot about your organization. What would you do?"

The blond man shrugged untroubledly. "We wouldn't kill you, if that's what you mean. We'd probably vote on whether to take you with us anyway or let you go." His smile was frank. "I'm glad we don't have to vote."

Ben nodded and turned to Maggie. "You're still coming with us?"

She shook her head, a mist shining in her sad eyes. "Not on this trip. Not without Jacob. I'll get one of our desert taxis back to Hoover City. Then I'll be going to Earth for a while. I've got some thinking to do and thinking is done best on Earth. Out here is the place for *feeling*." Her eyes lost a little of their pain. "But I'll be back. Jacob wouldn't stay on Earth. Neither will I. I'll be seeing you."

The big-eared man put his hand on Ben's shoulder.

"Think you can get us back to Juno?" he asked.

Ben looked at Maggie and then at the big-eared man. "You're as good as there," he said confidently.

—EDWARD W. LUDWIG

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one across

By ARTHUR SELLINGS

Illustrated by CAL

Doing puzzles is an escape, eh? Then how was it Norman found himself so boxed in?

"WELL, you took me for better or for worse," Norman answered without turning from the paper-littered table. "And you knew about it before you took me."

Ella smothered a sigh. Not even feminine logic could refute that one. What she hadn't known beforehand was the fiendish ingenuity of crossword compilers. After all, she had reasoned, a square was a square and words were words. There was a limit to both, and a limit to the interest a grown man should find in them.

A year of marriage had taught her otherwise. In good wifely fashion, she had tried to work up an intelligent interest in the things herself. But by the time she'd grasped what a cryptic clue was, that "bender you can take a

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child on" in four letters could only be *knee*, Norman had moved on to skeletons. She struggled gamely after, but before she'd even got the knack of filling the blacks in, Norman had discovered the delights of coded puzzles.

It was then that she gave up the unequal contest and looked on sadly while her husband threaded his way into deep and deeper mazes — square ones, round ones, pyramidal, hexagonal; literary, zoological, mathematical; straight, reversed, double-clued.

ELLA tried to tell herself she was lucky, that there were worse vices than an addiction to crosswords. But sometimes she couldn't help feeling lonely and resentful. And then, as she just had, she protested.

"It's not as if you ever made anything out of them," she complained, returning to the fray.

"Now if one across connects with five down, then five down connects with eleven through." In exactly the same abstracted tone, he said, "I won a gift certificate last year, didn't I?"

"And what did you do with it? Bought books of puzzles!"

He turned wearily in his chair. "Please, dear, don't badger me. This is the toughest one I've ever tackled. The queerest, too."

"Really," she said, yawning. "Well, it's half-past one. I'm going to bed."

"Good night, dear," Norman said. "Ah, that's it — eleven through connects with three *up*." His words tailed off into incoherence as he scribbled.

Ella shrugged hopelessly and went to bed.

And so she missed seeing — and perhaps it was a good thing she did — the fruits of her husband's toil.

After half an hour of frenzied activity, he laid his pencil aside, frowning perplexedly. He was sure he had found the key to it. He followed his tortuous lines of reasoning back, step by step, and they checked. There was no doubt about it, this was the only possible solution. But it didn't fit. There had to be four interlocking squares, yet how could there be? Unless —

Of course! The puzzle was *four*-dimensional. It was one across, one down, one through and — well, he'd have to call it one *out* for the moment. But that was it!

He jumped to his feet in triumph. He could see it now. He —

He suddenly experienced a feeling of vertigo, making him shut his eyes and bring his hand up to his head. Everything was a yellowish gray.

He shouldn't have leaped up like that, he told himself. It was

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having a strange effect on him. Geometric patterns flowered and dwindled between his eyeballs and his closed lids. They were like nothing else he had ever seen before. Except, perhaps, those trick drawings of cubes that you can't make up your mind whether you're seeing from above or below.

Suddenly the moving patterns froze and, the moment after, faded away. The dizziness left him. He opened his eyes thankfully.

And he sucked in his breath.

For he was no longer in his own living room, but standing in a yellow landscape under a copper-colored sky.

HE SHUT his eyes again hurriedly and thought hard. He must have been overdoing his solving puzzles lately, he reasoned. That was it — he had conked out and been removed to the hospital. He was in the grounds now. Perhaps he had lost his memory for a spell; those things happened.

But everything would be all right. Crosswords had taught him there was a name for practically everything, so there was sure to be one for this, some Greek or Latin name known to the serious-faced specialists who would be working on his case this very moment. Yes, everything was going to be all right. Of course.

With a desperate calm, he opened his eyes again.

And his heart sank. These were no hospital grounds. Unless the hospital was *underneath* him. And unless it was a special kind of place that hung an emerald sun up in the sky just to amuse the patients.

Because, for as far as he could see, a rolling sea of saffron-colored grass stretched away. Between gaps in the waves, he could make out a green haze on the horizon that looked like hills. That was all.

And this was *real;* he knew it in every fiber. He didn't stop to reflect how real a thing would appear to somebody with delusions. He knew he wasn't having any. And the sound he was suddenly conscious of was no delusion, either. A metallic clicking like — like some frightful beast sharpening long claws one against another. He felt his knees weaken.

The sound came from his left, from behind a hillock. He was standing almost on the slopes of the hillock, so that it shut out a large sector of his view. He listened. The creature must be as close to the hillock on the other side as he was on this.

He realized with a dreadful certainty that there was no sense in fleeing — not from an enemy

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he didn't know a thing about. It might be able to clear fifty feet in one bound, for instance. On the other hand, it might have some limitation that could be exploited. There was only one thing for it.

Accordingly, he edged his way round the intervening lump of ground. He came to the rim of it, thankful at least that whatever it was on the other side seemed not to have had the same idea. The clicking went on from the same direction, sinisterly and rhythmically.

An outcropping of some freakish crystalline rock made a good vantage point. He crouched down, his heart thumping wildly, and peered round it.

And there, in that yellow plain, under a green sun and a copper sky — was an old woman, a gentle-looking old soul, rocking away in a chair — knitting!

THE OLD woman looked up suddenly; a pair of beady eyes plainly saw him. He stepped out from cover.

The effect on the old lady was immediate. Her face broke into a toothless grin.

"A-ah," she quavered. "The collector. Come here, sir. I've been waiting a long time for you."

Norman approached her chair warily.

"I've got them all at my cabin," she told him excitedly. "All packed and ready. Two hundred and thirty-five."

"Two hundred and thirty-five *what?*" Norman asked in a daze.

"Why, chest protectors, of course." Her old eyes narrowed. "Wait, maybe you're a Rebel spy. I've heard tales of spies."

Norman looked around bafflediy. Startled by the incongruity of a quite mad, but otherwise ordinary enough old woman in the midst of this utterly strange landscape, he hadn't noticed what else might be visible on this side of the hillock.

His numbed mind took in several things now. One was a cluster of cabins, white-painted and as ordinary as the old woman. Another was more people. His immediate attention was taken by one striding purposefully toward him. It was a woman, clad in blouse and jodhpurs. The face, though young, looked as functional as the outfit.

She halted a couple of feet away, looking him over as if he were a horse. Then, before he could frame the questions he was bursting to ask, she said abruptly, "Anagram of cart horse."

Even in such bewildering circumstances, it was almost reflex for Norman. "Why — er — orchestra."

The girl nodded approvingly and stuck out a hand. "At last! I'd begun to give up hope. My

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name's Miss Hoff. *Miss* Hoff."

"Happy to meet you," Norman replied automatically. "Mine's Norman Woods."

The old woman pricked up her ears. "Woods, you say, son? Not kin of Colonel Woods of the Fifth New York Cavalry by any chance?"

The girl drew Norman away. "She thinks the Civil War's still on. It's best to leave her alone."

"Civil War?" Norman echoed. "Then this *is* an asylum?"

"Asylum?" said Miss Hoff. "Heavens, no! You're in another dimension, that's all."

"That's *all!*" He looked around wildly. "Look, I've got to get back! I — "

HE BROKE off. Miss Hoff was shaking her head slowly. "There is no way back, Mr. Woods."

"But there has to be." His voice started to spiral up toward hysteria. "This is all a dream. Yes, that's it. I'll wake up in a minute and — "

"Steady, *steady,*" said Miss Hoff. "Don't disappoint me. You don't want to get like him, do you?"

Norman was aware of an old man, dressed in ancient breeches and buckled shoes. As he ambled past, Norman distinctly heard him muttering, "Where are they? I just walked round 'em and they vanished. What have they done with the horses?"

Norman blinked and stared in the wake of the old man. He'd heard of *him.* But it couldn't be. That had been — how many years ago? — a couple of centuries or more.

"Bathurst's always looking for the horses," Miss Hoff said contemptuously. "At least old Mrs. Lockhart hasn't let it shake her from what she thinks is still her duty. It just demonstrates the superior adaptability of the female."

"Have it your way," Norman said impatiently. "But will you kindly tell me just what I have to adapt myself to? How did I get here? And you? And the others?"

"How? Because of *visualization* while following some intricate line of thought. I, for example, was working out a complex theorem in higher mathematics. Mrs. Lockhart was knitting comforts for the troops. Unfortunately she chose a rather complicated pattern. As for Bathurst, heaven knows what he was working out. I gave up asking long ago."

"But how can we all be here at the same time?" Norman objected. "Somebody from the eighteenth century and somebody from Civil War times — and us?" He laughed raggedly. "Or did *you* come from Ancient Rome?"

Miss Hoff looked at him frigid-

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ly. "I was born in 1893. I was translated in 1906. I was something of a child prodigy. The reason we can all be here at the same time is that time goes at only about a quarter of its normal rate in this world."

"But how is it you — almost seemed to be expecting me? And that anagram business, what was that? A password or something?"

Miss Hoff smiled enigmatically. "That can wait for the time being. Let me show you around our little settlement first. Oh, this is Jimmy." She turned to a vacant-looking youth who had just come out of one of the cabins. "Say hello to Mr. Woods, Jimmy. He's new here."

The youth looked at Norman for an uncomprehending moment, then shuffled on.

"A sad case of mental retardment," Miss Hoff commented. "But he's willing enough."

"But how did *he* get across? I thought you said it was a matter of the mind being engaged in a complex problem."

MISS HOFF stopped and fixed him with a steady eye. "*That* is something I've never been able to explain. Perhaps there's a certain trigger level, higher or lower according to the mentality of the individual. Anyway, whatever the cause, the effect is a rare one, as witness the small number here — only five in a century and a half; six now with you. And there were only one or two before then. I disinterred a few sets of bones to check what the natives told me."

"Natives?" Norman echoed in alarm. "What kind of natives?"

"Oh, not human ones. But friendly. You'll see one soon."

The tour of inspection took little time. The few cabins were comfortably, if primitively, furnished. Miss Hoff led him to her own.

"And this is Feen," she said as they entered. "He's the only native regularly here. The rest are busy building the city."

But Norman wasn't listening; he was too busy gaping at the creature who stood deferentially before them.

Under a face like the Cheshire Cat's, the torso was passably human. It was the lower appendages that were really odd — four stumpy legs on which the body stood upright as if on an undercarriage.

"All done, ma'am," Feen squeaked.

"Good," said Miss Hoff. "You may go."

Feen bowed low and retired. Miss Hoff gestured to Norman to sit down. He did so gratefully. A sudden thought occurred to him.

"Where's the other member of the happy band?" he asked.

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Miss Hoff's face darkened. "He, Mr. Woods, is a disgrace to your sex. He spends all his time drinking."

Norman reflected that Miss Hoff's standards seemed altogether too high. If a man, marooned in this outlandish place, took to drink, he had every right to. "How did he get across?" he asked.

"The same way I did. He was a mathematician, too. A fine mind. But mind is no good without strength of character." Her eye was on Norman. "That is why I hope you will prove worthy of my trust."

"Look," Norman said, "don't talk to me of trust. It seems to me I'm being asked to take a whale of a lot on trust myself. For instance, you told me there's no way back. You also told me that you came over in 1906. So will you tell me how you happen to be wearing a nylon blouse?"

HER composure flickered for a moment. Then she smiled thinly. "Very observant of you. I'm glad you are. But I didn't want to explain everything until you were in a calmer frame of mind."

"And I shan't be in that," Norman told her, "until you do explain. There *is* a way back, isn't there?"

"There is, Mr. Woods. I use it to bring back things we need. But it only works for me. It needs a knowledge of higher math *and* an unusual ability to visualize. You have to see your way back."

"I saw my way here," he said doggedly. "I can see my way back."

She leaned back in her chair. "Try then. But you'll be wasting your time. Imagine a forest and a thousand and one paths branching from Point A. Only one of them reaches Point B. A man leaving B would be bound to reach A. But if he left A to reach B, the odds would be a thousand to one against him. A poor analogy, but it may serve to prove to you that a return journey isn't as easy as the one here."

Norman looked at her, his suspicion withering into a despairing conviction that she was telling the truth.

"Anyway," she went on, "you'll have better things to do. Naturally, I had a purpose in getting you here."

"*Getting* me here?" He stared at her. "You *were* expecting me then!"

"Well, not exactly you, but someone. You see, it took a good bit of working out. I had somehow to lead a mind into the path. In the end, I had the idea of incorporating it in a crossword puzzle. Getting it accepted in the paper was the hardest part, but

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I managed it. You seem to be the only one who solved it."

He gaped at her, then collapsed, despite himself, in laughter. "You mean — I won the prize? This — " He flapped a helpless hand.

Her reaction was plainly disapproving. "This, Mr. Woods, is worth more than any Earthly prize. Here you have a great mission. You, young and a man, are ideally suited — apart from a certain flippancy which I trust you will learn to curb. My main fear was that only another woman, or an old man, would have solved it. I would have had to try again."

Norman's laughter halted. "How do you mean?"

"Because," she said calmly, "my aim is to build a new world here. It must be obvious to you that neither of the two males you have seen is suitable for the purpose. And the other one — " she shuddered — "is disgusting."

IT TOOK several seconds for her meaning to grow clear. Then he recoiled visibly.

Miss Hoff looked affronted. "The notion disturbs you?"

"But I — I'm married," he stuttered, grasping at the first excuse handy to avoid the clutches of a female as cold and forbidding as this.

"Nonsense. That's in another world." She fixed a stern eye on him, as if divining the true reason for his reaction. "And you can forget all the romantic absurdity of the so-called culture you left behind. It only diverted energies that could be better used in other directions, as well as obscuring the chaotic state of things there."

She leaned toward him. "Don't you see the opportunity here? A chance to start all over again, to build such a civilization as Earth has never known — a rule of the intellect. The natives here will supply the manual labor gladly. Their whole delight in life is serving others. In fifty years, we can build a Utopia."

Her eyes gleaming, the severely practical Miss Hoff seemed as near to emotion as he had yet seen her. The trouble was, he didn't care for that particular emotion. And then a thought struck him that filled him with a blind and futile rage.

"You fool!" he exploded. "You talk of intellect! Yet you snare me, uproot me, for some lunatic idea — *and all the time it wasn't necessary.* You could have begun your dynasty on Earth. You didn't need a man *here.*"

"Do you think it would have been so easy?" she answered imperturbably. "Not with the right kind of man, anyway. Besides, it won't be just a one-time affair. And you will have other duties,

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such as the upbringing of the children. Women will be liberated in this world. It's laid down in the Code of Conduct. But that can wait until you've settled down. I have gone into the matter scientifically. Procreation must be undertaken with a quiet mind."

Norman looked into her face and realized that she meant it — every word of it. She must have read it out of books. She had grown from child to woman in a world cut off from all the pleasures of civilization. All the time she must have been planning to this end. It was going to be some crackpot Utopia. And what would *he* be to posterity? Norman the First? Or Procreating Unit One? He shivered.

"Meanwhile," she said, "we eat and then to bed. I have a cabin prepared for you."

NORMAN lay awake for a long time, tired though he was, pondering on the spot he was in. It could have been worse, he supposed. Whatever Miss Hoff's faults, she seemed to have organized things well. The cabins were comfortable and pleasant. The supper had been uncooked and vegetarian — that was also in the Code of Conduct, she told him — but it had been palatable.

But it was the sheer wrench of things that hurt. He was completely lacking in any Robinson Crusoe aptitudes. His daily round, quiet and humble as it may have been, had been enough; he had been content. He felt a wave of self-pity flood through him — a heartfelt regret that he'd ever set eyes on that damned puzzle.

But it was too late now, he told himself. He'd have to accept things. The thought that that included mating with the formidable Miss Hoff brought him out in a cold sweat. Wait, though! He didn't have to play ball! But his efforts to tell himself that weren't very successful. He had a strong suspicion that Miss Hoff had means of enforcing her will. She was sure to have the natives on her side. She had probably bought them over with baubles she brought back from Earth.

He wondered sleepily what she used for money on those trips. Perhaps this place was crawling with gold; perhaps . . .

It seemed that he had only just dropped off to sleep when he felt a hand shaking him by the shoulder. He blinked up indignantly.

A man stood over him, holding a lantern.

"Who are you?" Norman demanded.

"Ambrose Gedge," the man said. "I was otherwise engaged when you arrived."

Norman's nostrils bore to his sleep-fuddled brain a strong aroma of alcohol. So this was the

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other member of the settlement. "Pleased to meet you," he grumbled. "But did you have to come to say hello in the middle of the night?" He turned over.

"But I came to say good-by." The man's voice was thick. "And to wish you good luck. I'm going off to the mountains. I couldn't stand the sight of you and — and Bertha — together."

Norman turned back. "Bertha?"

"Miss Hoff." Gedge, a tubby red-faced man, seemed overcome with emotion. "I envy you your luck, old man."

"Luck?" Norman echoed.

"Of course. A whole little world of your own. And *Bertha.*" He sighed. "What a type! So proud, so masterly."

MARVELING at the wide range of people's tastes, Norman stared at him.

"Only one trouble with her," Gedge went on, "she's too damn finicky. First day I was here, I thought I was going to have fun — but that put Bertha right off. That's what drove me to the bottle. That put her off even more. A vicious circle, my friend." He shook his head sadly. "I thought she was coming 'round to my way of thinking, but then she got this crossword plan. Now my chances are finished."

"You're welcome to her," Norman said, "and to this place. I'd give my right arm to get away."

"You *would?*" Gedge seized him by the shoulder. "Well, you can if you want to."

Norman jerked upright, blinking unbelievingly at him. "But Miss Hoff said it needed higher math and visualization. I can visualize, but I'm not much good at math."

Gedge winked. "You can get a headache from higher math; you can also get it from hitting yourself over the head with a mallet. Come over to my cabin. I'll show you something."

Wide awake now, Norman dressed hurriedly and followed Gedge, telling himself not to hope too much, that it might all be the ravings of a drunk.

Dawn was breaking. Nobody else was in sight. Gedge showed Norman into his cabin. He ferreted under his bed, fetched out something covered in cloth and unwrapped it.

The first sight of it half-confirmed Norman's fears. It was a framework of sticks, lashed together in a complicated and seemingly purposeless structure.

"This," said Gedge, "is the way back. It's a visual aid. Getting back is harder, as Bertha probably told you. But she doesn't know that I found it my way. The only thing is that you have to get pretty drunk for it to work."

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"Anything," said Norman fervently.

"Good." Gedge thrust a large earthenware bottle at him. Norman took a gulp and coughed. It was fiery stuff.

"Only native rotgut, I'm afraid," the other said apologetically. "Bertha refuses to bring me any real stuff back with her."

"But can't you bring your own back?"

"Hah, wish I could. I only tried it once. I nearly got arrested back there. It seems that when I disappeared, people thought I'd gone behind the Iron Curtain. And since I was engaged in a secret project, that makes it highly unsafe to go back."

NORMAN remembered now the uproar the case had caused several years back. He offered his sympathies.

"It was a dog's life anyway," Gedge said indifferently. "I only thought this gadget up so I wouldn't be dependent on Bertha for supplies. But you get used to even to this stuff. Hey, drink up!"

"I'm going as fast as I can," said Norman. "I'm not a drinking man." He took another gulp. "Is it any good trying now?"

"Lord, no. You've got to get pickled. Come on, *drink*."

Norman dutifully drained the bottle. Gedge handed him another, chuckling. "I can't wait to see Bertha's face when she finds you're gone." He treated himself to a generous swig at the thought. "I bet she'll — "

He broke off, startled, as a rapping sounded on the door.

"Bertha!" he whispered hoarsely. "Quick, hide behind the door." Norman jumped to it. Gedge opened the door cautiously.

"Ah, your good pardon, sir," came a quavering voice. "But have you seen a coach and horses? I was — "

Norman heard Gedge's breath exhaled in a shuddering sigh. "They went thataway," he said.

GEDGE turned back, sweating heavily. "Come on, drink up. We've got no time to lose. I can't stand the strain."

Norman choked down another mouthful. "But how do I know where I'll get back? I mean *he* disha — hey, hear that? We're getting somewhere! But I mean *he* disappeared in Europe. What if I turn up in the middle of the Atlantic?"

"No fear of that, old man. I've mapped out the contangency. All of Earth touches only a small area here. Where do you want to get back to?"

"New York."

"Mm — well, we can arrange that. Though we'd better make it out in the country just to be on

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the safe side. The map's over there, under my pillow. Get it, will you?"

Norman didn't realize until he staggered that this was a test.

"Good," said Gedge. "That ought to do it. Let's get outside. We'll take a bottle apiece to make sure."

Though it was quite light now, the coast seemed clear as they picked their way between the dunes.

"Well, take one for the road," said Gedge. "Now — look at this."

Norman squinted at the gadget.

"Start from this point. Now follow to this one. See? No, don't close one eye — that won't do. Now follow from one point to the next."

Norman did as he was told. But all he felt was dizziness. "It's no good," he said after a couple of minutes effort.

"Keep at it," Gedge said. "Wait — " he cocked an ear — "what was that? No, keep on looking." He lurched over to the outcropping of rock and peered around it.

He turned back instantly, his face white. "For heaven's sake, hurry! It's Bertha. She must have missed you."

Norman tried again. From one joint of the gadget to the next, his eyes followed feverishly. His head spun. "It's no good," he groaned. He staggered. And then he seemed to be falling, falling . . .

THE NEXT he knew, he was staring blearily up at a blue-uniformed figure.

"Where am I?" he asked weakly.

"You're in South Orange police station, bud. Boy, were you tight! You'll have some explaining to do to the judge in the morning."

"Judge?" said Norman joyously. He was back then!

He struggled to a sitting position, but the effort was too brutal. He raised a hand to his splitting head.

The cop looked at him oddly. "Well, if the thought of the judge makes you so happy, you'll like knowing that you have some explaining to do before you meet him. The call's been out for you for two days. The little lady's on her way here now."

Two days? Of course, the time rate. But Ella? How could he start explaining?

"Seems she left you doin' a crossword puzzle or somethin'." The cop scratched his head. "I've heard of queer things drivin' a man to drink, but — "

"That was the last time," said Norman devoutly. "Never again."

"Yeah, that's what they all say."

"I didn't mean drinking," said Norman.

—ARTHUR SELLINGS

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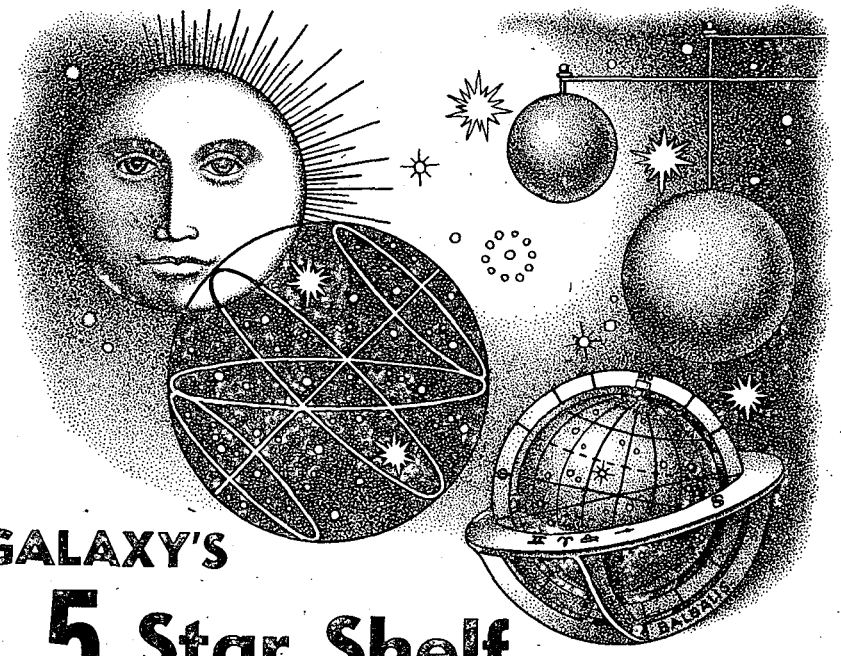

GALAXY'S

5 Star Shelf

YOUR SINS AND MINE by Taylor Caldwell. Gold Medal Books, 25c

MISS Caldwell has still not written a science fiction book. Instead, this is pure fantasy, envisioning a near future in which God is fed up with the murderous antics of Man and poisons the Earth against him. There is no rain and nothing edible will grow. The fertile lands are overgrown with a weed that harbors a huge poisonous insect whose bite is fatal. Food supplies are being rapidly depleted.

The situation is worldwide, but censorship in the various countries prohibits the printing of any information. Delegates still argue in the United Nations, A- and H-bombs are still boastfully exploded.

The story is told by a young married veteran whose father, a patient, Joblike tower of strength, is the only one who recognizes the pestilence as Divine Retribution. Maybe you or I would quibble with Miss Caldwell's picture of Earth abandoned and the behavior of the starving populace or the idea of Divine Retribution.

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However, many stretches of the book have a Biblical power.

All in all, a disturbing plea for sanity and peace. No argument there, at least.

REPORT ON THE STATUS QUO by Terence Roberts. Merlin Press, Inc., $2.50

THE title is completely descriptive of the book. This strange, yet amusing little story is written in the form of a report by the secretary of the Combined Scientific Societies of the U. S. A. to the Secretary of Science, evidently a new Cabinet post, on April 16, 1961.

It concerns the Status Quo, but not the one we are familiar with, being a preliminary account in advance of the full scientific reports of the events that led to the disorganization of the world.

It appears that in 1958 and '59, while the rest of the world was busily engaged in WW III, an unprecedented rainy dry season as well as a very rainy rainy season washed away the topsoil of the Hinche Plateau in the interior of Haiti. The bluish Nitro-earth thus exposed is the cause of all the trouble. It is Mesozoic in origin, having been covered these past millions of years, but nowhere on Earth so close to the surface as in this spot in Haiti.

Due to the global preoccupation with the war, no one except James Carstairs, a sociologist, and Sylvia Rendle, a journalist, who were unfortunate enough to be marooned on the plateau for a year, realized that Man was about to lose his unchallenged grip on the planet. Exposed to the revitalizing sunshine, the Nitro-earth is giving up its hoarded store of dinosaur eggs and parasitic diseases which disappeared millions of years ago.

The report is a personalized account of the beginning of this struggle against Nature. Very impressive, too, both in scholarship and tension.

THE EDGE OF THE SEA by Rachel Carson. Houghton Mifflin Co., $3.95

WHERE I live—Far Rockaway, on Long Island, N. Y.—we have more sea than anything else except trouble with the L. I. R. R. Of the two, I'll take the sea any time—especially the sea as Rachel Carson describes it.

Miss Carson takes us into many of her intimate seashore spots and shows us wonders there that we never would suspect existed in such barren surroundings.

I recall one day this year that my kids and I watched a tremendous horde of egg-shaped mole crabs, uprooted by successive

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waves, burrowing simultaneously until, in a flash, there was nothing to be seen but sand and a receding wave, leaving a sense of illusion. From Miss Carson's description of these creatures, I would swear that she was looking over my shoulder and reading my reactions.

It is a fascinating book that has us waiting impatiently for warm weekends to return so that we can discover other marvels for ourselves. It is also a beautiful book, with excellent illustrations by Bob Hines of U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service on almost every page. It doesn't have the sweep and grandeur of *The Sea Around Us*, but neither does its subject matter. It's a homy book about salt-water neighbors.

GUIDE TO THE STARS by Hector MacPherson. Philosophical Library, $2.75

THIS is for the beginner and a fine broth of a book Dr. MacPherson has written, too. In simple, clear fashion, it takes the novice through the heavens, starting with the Northern Stars, which change position least throughout the year. From them, after pointing out unmistakable signposts, he proceeds to the constellations, taking them one by one and listing the items of interest in each, following the seasonal changes of the sky.

An added bonus is a section of star maps at the end, which delineates the important constellations and denotes the magnitude of the constituent stars.

FRONTIERS OF ASTRONOMY by Fred Hoyle. Harper & Brothers, $5.00

A handsome and fascinating book indeed. The style is attractive and often witty, especially in the information and theories the author blithely tosses about. Naturally you know that Mother Earth is now thought to be four billion years old instead of two—but that means that the gal we've been stuck on all our life turns out to be twice as old as we thought.

Not only did Hoyle disillusion me thusly, but he claims that the Earth did not start out as a molten sphere, as we had been taught, but as an agglomeration of cold bodies that stuck together and gradually squeezed the lighter elements to the surface.

He also theorizes that hydrocarbons existed before the Earth and that far more is trapped below the surface than is suspected.

Hoyle really comes into his own, though, on the cosmic scale with the generation of galaxies!

The book pictorially is on the same grand scale as the text, with

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almost fifty exceptional photos by the largest instruments extant, as well as numerous line drawings.

REVOLT ON ALPHA C by Robert Silverberg. Thomas Y. Crowell Company, $2.00

THIS is a book that I would have liked when I was a youngster. Silverberg knows his audience and they're his equals, as they should be, while he relates his fast-moving story of a new space cadet caught up in a series of events that prove almost too much for his divided loyalty.

Larry Stark is the cadet, son of a commander in the Patrol and convinced through his training that Earth can do no wrong, that even the Jovian colonial revolt, quelled bloodily by Terra, was in no way caused by Earth.

His friend on his shakedown cruise to Alpha Centauri is a Martian youth, loyal to the Patrol but wise enough to see the justice of the colonies' position.

When they arrive at Alpha C IV, they find that three of the four settlements have revolted against Earth rule. And when Larry sees banners with slogans like "No Taxation without Representation," they awaken in him an understanding of history that kids will excitedly share.

MARTIN AND HIS FRIEND FROM OUTER SPACE by Ivo Duka and Helena Kolda. Harper & Brothers, $2.50

THIS book could be a transcription of any modern child's dreams. It was almost impossible for me to tear it it of the avid hands of my family in order to do this review.

An average boy, Martin, who could be you—at an early age, of course—builds himself a contraption of tin-foil, candy boxes, radio tubes, Slinky the spring and his Space Helmet. Only, Joy of Joys, it works!

He establishes communication with a golden-haired beauty from Marinoid, Saturn's Moon of the Sea, on which there is no solid land. They make a date to meet at Battery Park via matter transference and then proceed to have one heckuva adventurous day at Coney Island.

Martin's broke, but his gal is a *real* golden-hair. They hock a lock, attracting the greedy attention of a lurking cad who chases them throughout the day for the gold of her hair. Martin thwarts the blackguard in true Boy-hero style.

The photos by Miss Kolda are done in wonderful keeping with the joyful make-believe spirit of the book.

— FLOYD C. GALE

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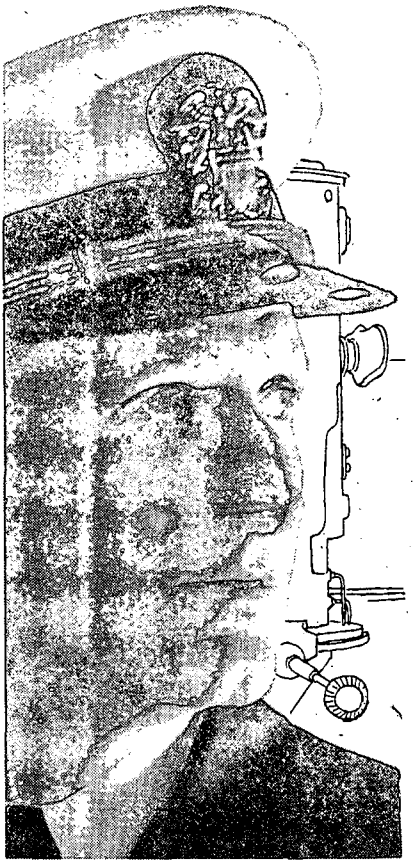
Slave Ship

Conclusion

By FREDERIK POHL

Here was the end product of this war that was not a war—an entire naval task force to protect some dogs and apes and seals!



SYNOPSIS

LOGAN MOELLER is my name, Lieutenant, j.g., U.N. Naval Reserve. I was a combat officer of the line in what we laughingly called the Cold War—laughingly because, with a million casualties a year, it wasn't very cold; and because, when you stopped and looked around, it wasn't exactly a war. How can you have a war without an enemy?

The CAODAIS *weren't a country; they were a religion that had swept up out of Indo-China, overrun Asia, Oceania and Africa, and were obviously well on the way to adding the rest of the world. You can't declare war on a religion, can you? And so it wasn't war, but meanwhile we fought and died and took prisoners.*

ELSIE, for instance, was only one prisoner out of hundreds of

Illustrated by EMSH

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thousands—but she was the one that counted with me because she was my wife. She had volunteered, months before the universal draft could have caught her, and she had been captured. While I was on combat duty at sea, it wasn't so bad—I had other things on my mind. But then I was transferred —to a strange shore station:

PROJECT MAKO, where it *seemed COMINCH wanted us to learn how to talk to animals. What did they have to do with fighting the Caodais?*

SENIOR LIEUTENANT SEMYON ILYITCH TIMAYAZEV, *late of Kras-*

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noye Armee, now, since the Red Army no longer existed, a military attache of the People's Democratic Tsarist Republican Russian Government-in-Exile, was assigned to Project Mako because, apparently, his mother had been one of Pavlov's assistants decades before. With him, I managed to get somewhere with the actual task of manning a fighting submarine with animals and it began to seem that our project might get somewhere. But the Cold War suddenly began hotting up. Worst of all was something called:

THE GLOTCH — *"unidentified ballistic phenomenon, presumably hostile." It was a kind of radiation burn that killed, almost every time, and it struck anywhere. If the Caodais had a weapon like that, it was the end of the war—unless we could knock out that weapon. So reasoned COMINCH and he plucked Semyon and me and half a dozen of our animals out of Project Mako and put us on a task force to strike at what Intelligence believed to be Caodai headquarters for the new weapon. Our objective was Madagascar—and Elsie was interned on Zanzibar, and the map showed it to be only a hair away. But there was a girl, a commissioned stripper in a government-operated nightclub nearby, where she had been named:*

NINA MERRIAM; *now she turned up again—no longer commissioned but an enlisted woman, no longer a stripper but a mess attendant in the aircraft carrier Monmouth's wardroom — and no longer named Nina Merriam! I dragged her to the executive officer's cabin to have her arrested as a spy, but general quarters sounded; we were in Caodai waters and a bandit flotilla showed up in our sonars!*

XIV

THE LIEUTENANT was on his way to his battle station before the klaxon had stopped blaring. The exec was a moment slower, but not because he was paying any attention to us. He bellowed something into his intercom, listened for a second, bellowed again, and was gone. There was no one left but the girl and me.

She said urgently: "Let me go, Lieutenant! You've got this all wrong. I've got to get out of here and—"

I said: "Shut up!" I was feeling jittery. General quarters is a powerful voice of command. I had no battle station on *Monmouth*; I was supercargo, as useless in an engagement and as undesirable as the wardroom silver the old surface ships used to jettison before a fight.

But I didn't want to be useless;

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I wanted to respond to the alarm, and all I could do was stay here and look ugly at a young girl. Bandits in fleet strength! It wasn't even a wanderer on picket duty or a cruising raider that we might hope to swamp before it could transmit a signal. It meant fleet action if they spotted us—and we were big enough for anyone to spot.

I felt the angle of the deck change and, simultaneously, a slowing in the throb of the screws. I could see in my mind just what was happening: We were rebal-lasting our tanks, tipping our div-ing fins, slowing our propellers to a gentle wash as we headed for the bottom.

Under a good thick blanket of the dense, cold Antarctic Deep water, we might not be spotted. Sonar echoes took odd bounces off the interfaces between layers of water of differing densities and of all the water in the Earth's oceans, Antarctic Deep made the sharpest, cleanest interface. That much, at least, was good.

THE GIRL was saying: "I tell you one more time, Lieuten-ant—get out of my way. That's a direct order!"

"What?" I stared at her. I was between her and the door, and I was going to stay there. It would have been nice if I had had a weapon. I felt a little foolish, standing there with my bare hands hanging at my sides, but of course I shouldn't really need any more than bare hands to subdue a hundred-and-five-pound girl. I said: "I'd appreciate it if you'd shut up until the exec gets back. But you're not leaving here, un-derstand that."

"I'm not a Cow-dye, you idiot! I'm Nina Willette of Navy Intelli-gence and you're keeping me from the most important job I've ever done!"

She took a deep breath and fought for control of herself. She was, all at once, superbly beauti-ful as she stood glaring at me, her shoulders thrown back, her eyes filled with fury, and I suppose she knew it very well. They are ac-tors by trade, these cloak-and-dagger people; how was a simple line officer like myself to know whether she was telling the truth or not?

She said, with an effort: "Look, Lieutenant, I'll explain it to you. I'm Counter-intelligence. I was on security duty when I was a strip-per at Boca Raton. I'm on secu-rity duty now. There are paci-fists in *Monmouth*'s complement, Moeller! Do you know what that means? Right now, we're at battle stations. This is the time when I ought to be out on the prowl, making sure everybody's at his station, looking for trouble before it starts—and I'm here waiting

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for a fat-headed j.g. to make up his mind to let me go. Get out of my way!"

"Good try," I said, but I was shaken. "Stay where you are."

Well, she was some kind of spy or counter-spy, but she was only a girl, and a small one and a young one at that. All of a sudden, her eyes filled with tears. She sobbed and leaned blindly forward; instinctively, I reached out to help her. She clung to me, weeping, and it was like holding a fragrant, sad flower.

I hadn't known that enlisted women used perfume. The exec and the encroaching Caodais seemed very remote and I found myself patting her head and saying soothing things.

And then the roof fell in.

I CAME to with a lump behind my right ear and there was no one in the exec's office but me; Nina whatever-her-name-was was gone. Lord knows what she hit me with, but it was nothing to what the exec hit me with when he came back for a brief racing second and found me standing dopily in the middle of the floor. I don't suppose he said more than twenty words to me, but every one of them dug deep under the skin and festered.

It seems that she was indeed Naval Intelligence. And a full commander at that.

I saluted empty air; he was gone already. It seemed like a good place to be out of, so I left. In any case, even though I didn't have a real battle station, there was a place where I was supposed to be.

Semyon and I had been assigned a whaleboat, deep in the lower decks of the carrier, far below even the aircraft hangars, below the engineering sections, in the steel belly of the ship, surrounded by jet fuel for the aircraft and diesel oil for the torps and auxiliaries. It was where the animals were kept, for the whaleboat would be our assault vessel for the landing on Madagascar—if we ever got that far. And it was where I was supposed to be in any action.

I headed for it through the roaring tumult of a capital ship at general quarters. There was plenty of noise aboard *Monmouth* just then, but it was mostly vocal—the racket of the loud-hailers, the sharp orders of the officers with working parties, the rattle of sighting orders as I passed the fire-control compartments.

But the engines were a gentle whisper, barely enough to maintain steerage way. For human voices would not penetrate the ship's hull to give us away to the enemies around us in the dense, chill water draining off the Antarctic ice pack, but the sounds of

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our screws most surely would. We were well into the Indian Ocean, surrounded by Caodai Africa, Caodai Asia and the inhospitable ice. The Caodais thought of it as their private lake, as we did the Caribbean, and with just as much reason. Even if the sighted Caodai vessels missed us, there would be others.

Of course, we did have the curtain of the thermoplane over our heads and that was a help. But it was as helpful to the Caodais now as to us. I was sympathizing with the men at the sonar stations, pinging into the dark deeps, charting and weighing the echoes that came back. There would be a vague splash of light in the sonar screen, warped by distance, almost obliterated by the thermoplane. Was it a blue whale, a school of fish—or a Caodai sub?

Our real advantage was that we could fairly assume any sighting was a sub, whereas they might not expect to find us here.

SEMYON WAS already in the whaleboat. He was sitting with the puppies in his lap, talking nervously to Josie. He blinked at me as I slid in through the entrance hatch.

He scrambled to his feet and then: "Oh," he said in relief, "it is you, Logan. I did not know but perhaps it was an admiral. In *Krasnoye Armee*—"

"—there were no admirals," I finished for him. "Are the animals all right?"

"Oh," he said dourly, "they will perhaps survive, if the rest of us do. Have you news, Logan? Are we to be in combat?"

"Can't you hear the squawkbox?"

It was rattling a repetition of what it had been saying, at intervals, ever since the first alarm: "*Remain at stations. We have lost sonar contact, but the audic listening posts indicate the enemy still on course.*" Which meant that we had stopped pinging the waters for fear of having them hear our own sonars, but our directional microphones had a fix on the Caodai screws, not muffled as ours were because, it appeared, they did not know we were around.

That was good. Now if only they didn't close to a point where even the curtain between the dense, cold water and the bottom and the lighter, warmer, saltier layers above no longer screened us from their sonars.

Semyon sat down and lifted the puppies into his lap. He clucked over them and petted them. "Always jumping up and down," he complained. "Is never a moment to sit, or to play chess, or merely to think. Ah, Irkutsk, if only I could see you once again! How precious the memory—"

His voice trailed off; he was

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staring past me at the entrance hatch. I turned and there was Nina Willette-or-whatever. She had with her the surly officer named Winnington and she also had a wide-mouthed, dangerous-looking gun in her hand.

I said dazedly, "Lieutenant Timayazev, Commander Willette."

Semyon pushed the puppies off his lap and stood up to give her a ramrod Red Army salute, hand twanging wide at the temple like the ancient Coldstream Guards. But he glanced at me inquiringly at the same time.

I started to explain, but the girl cut me off. "Inside, Winnington," she said, and gestured with the gun. And to me: "Sorry to barge in like this, but I had to get him out of the way. They'd tear him to pieces back in the fire-control room."

WINNINGTON ONLY looked even more sullen. He walked casually over to the navigator's desk, pushed Josie onto the floor and sat. "You've got no right to do this," he observed flatly.

"No right!" she blazed, but Semyon outblazed her.

"Svoloch!" he roared at Winnington. "Leave dog alone! She was not hurting you, the dog!" Josie whined her complaints; and then, as she caught the timbre of her boss's voice, barked threateningly: *"Go away! Go away!"*

Winnington looked more alarmed at Semyon and the dog than he had at Nina's gun. "Get these characters off me," he appealed to her.

"I ought to let the dog take a bite," she answered. "But we'll save you for better things." She sat down, looking drained, and glanced at me. "Congratulations, Lieutenant," she said. "You almost loused things up, but not quite. I got to Winnington just as he was about to pull the trigger on the Caodais."

He said matter-of-factly: "I was setting up range and vectors. That's all. I wouldn't have fired without an order."

She laughed. "Of course not. And you're not a pacifist, either, are you?"

"Pacifist?" I said, shocked. And Semyon blared: "Patchifist? This one, a patchifist? Logan, leave me turn Josie loose on him! Is first patchifist I have ever in my whole life seen!"

"Lay off," I begged him. "Tell me about it, Nina—Commander, I mean."

"Nina will do," she said wearily. "That's all there is to tell. I was assigned to keep an eye on him; he's been under surveillance for a long time. But he's smart. He didn't make a move—until it could be a big one. If I had been five seconds later, he would have salvoed his whole battery at the

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Caodais — and they would have blown us right out of the water ten minutes later."

Winnington laughed sharply, but he didn't say anything. He was watching Semyon, cradling Josie in his arms and murmuring to her in Dog, with what appeared to be genuine amusement.

A pacifist! I'd seen traces of their work, a newspaper report of a time bomb at the Caodai legation, an Army installation mysteriously ablaze, but as far as I knew, I had never seen one in the flesh. And here was Winnington, my surly bridge partner of the wardroom, revealed as an authentic pacifist! It was like seeing a cobra emerging from a washstand drain—the essence of evil where only familiar and safe things should be.

I started to question her, but the rattle of the loud-hailers in the passageway stopped me. There was a new tone to the bridge talker's voice: "Attention on deck! All hands to Condition Baker! Bandits past closest point of contact and holding steady on course." And then, humanly: "They missed us!"

"SO YOU see, patchifist," Semyon said nastily, "you have lost your chance!"

"Leave him alone," I told him. There was tramping and talking in the passageways as the damage-control parties came up from the fuel tanks, where they had been waiting for possible Caodai hits and almost certain cremation if one occurred. They looked hardly human in their anti-flash face paint and heavy hoods. Josie, spying them from the entrance hatch, barked like a rabid animal.

"Hush!" said Semyon to her, and repeated the order in Dog whine.

I asked Nina Willette: "Now what? Do you want me to escort you back to the exec's office with this one?"

"Give us ten minutes," she said. "Let them cool off a little. We pretty near had a lynching when I arrested him."

Winnington might not even have heard her; he continued to watch Semyon try to soothe the disturbed dogs, still with the air of amused detachment. He bent over casually to remove one of the puppies from his shoes and Josie, the vigilant mother, sprang for him.

Semyon made a grab and caught her, yipping, by the tail, while the puppies clamored at him. "Fortune pulverize the fortune-pulverized beasts!" Semyon snarled. "Hush, now! Hush!" And he went on to bawl them out in Dog.

Nina said approvingly: "He barks like a native." Semyon glowered at her briefly. But only

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briefly, because no mere human distraction could keep him from animals.

"All right, all right!" he said, in a mock-furious motherly growl. "Semyon will tell you a story. Be calm! A nice story, I promise it." He had spoken in English, but the dogs, and even the seals behind their bars, reacted at once. Apparently they recognized the word "story," which told me a little something I hadn't known before about why Semyon so frequently slipped back to the animal quarters for a few moments before he went to bed.

Winnington stared in disgusted unbelief and Nina almost exploded. Well, it *was* a mad sight: There were the animals, yapping with joy; there was Semyon, oblivious of us all; and there were Nina and Winnington, watching a full-grown fighting man tell bedtime stories to a brood of animals. It must have been even funnier to them than it was to me.

SEMYON HAD a mixed audience. It was like tucking a six-year-old and a three-year-old into bed at the same time. One story will more or less do for both of them, but the differences in vocabulary mean you have to double up on the story as you go along—something like the facing Hebrew and English pages in the Holy Book they read from at the Christmas Feast of Lights.

Semyon squatted down among the dogs, next to the seal pen, and then it was a steady stream of bark-whine-sniff-and-twitch, shiver-and-whine, grimace-and-growl. The animals were delighted; they followed the story with frantic absorption.

And Nina was delighted, too. After the first incredulous stare, she stuffed a handkerchief to her mouth and kept it there, eyes on Semyon. She managed not to laugh out loud, which is more than I could say for Winnington.

But Semyon was oblivious. It was the longest monologue in any animal tongue I have ever heard, and I realized that it accounted for a lot in the comparative fluency Semyon had over me in talking with the dogs; it must have been splendid practice. I watched him admiringly as he improvised substitutes for words that did not exist, wagging the tail he didn't have, making the croupy barks that are Seal punctuation. When he finished, the animals applauded wildly.

And so did Nina. "Thank you very much," she said sincerely, regaining her self-control.

Semyon asked suspiciously: "For what, thanks?"

"For telling us the story of Little Red Riding Hood. I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

He looked puzzled. "Oh, no,

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Commander. Was not Riding Hood. How would that be tactful? Was Goldilocks and Three Bears, don't you see?"

He stopped, indignant; Nina had lost her self-control completely on that one. And when she laughed, that broke me up.

But it didn't last. Nina stopped short and blinked at me. "What was that?"

I felt it, too. The deck pulsed underneath us. A pause, and it pulsed again, as though a blue whale were nuzzling playfully up to *Monmouth*.

But it was no whale, I knew. I had felt the same gentle pulsing on *Spruance*; I knew the feel of the recoil as a ship's main batteries loosed against an enemy.

Winnington grated triumphantly: "Caught me, did you? But maybe there was somebody you missed!"

Someone had salvoed a burst of at least a dozen missiles. If we had been hiding, we weren't hiding any more; those missiles were laid on course at the fat and ignorant Caodais as they waddled blissfully away from us.

But they wouldn't be waddling any more.

XV

IT WAS bad. Worse than we figured. While the four of us and the animals waited in the whaleboat, the loud-hailers roared orders and the ship lurched continually against the recoil of missiles leaving for Caodai targets. And then there was a shudder that was not a missile leaving the tubes.

A Caodai torpedo had exploded against our deflection net, close enough to jar us all, and then another, and more, and one final one that was not against the net but against the hull of *Monmouth*.

We were hit, and badly.

And even that was not the end.

Monmouth took six direct hits by my own count, standing helpless in the whaleboat. The ship was hurt. Our lights failed and then went on again as the secondary circuits cut in. The secondaries failed and our own whaleboat batteries lit the little cabin as I cut in the sealer switches. Outside in the passageways, there was no power at all, at least in our deep-laid section of the keelson, but from far away I could hear the rattle of the loud-hailers, and what they snapped out sharply was:

"All auxiliaries abandon ship! All auxiliaries abandon ship!"

And that was the beginning of long hours of death-in-life for the four of us.

We hugged the bottom, squatted there and waited.

Crippled *Monmouth* was still

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fighting. We could hear the distant explosions; but there wasn't anything we could do about it. Communication was impossible; the deeps were shuddering with explosions enough to drown out any call. To fight was out of the question: Our whaleboat had no armament, for the space for the missile rackets and projectile tubes had been preempted by the animal pens.

We squatted and waited.

There came a time when the noise of combat slacked off and seemed more distant. I cut out the ruptured "eardrums" of our sound-ranging gear and tried to take a fix. There was still fighting, but it was drifting south of us and east.

Nina said over my shoulder, watching the indicator needles: "They're running for it. The Caodais are chasing them."

It seemed that way, but whatever *Monmouth* was up to, we had still only one choice—to wait. If we were spotted by any Caodai, even a corvette, we were done; but if we stayed dead and silent on the ocean floor, we had a prayer of a hope. We would be spotted, no doubt about it, but spotted as a hulk of metal, nothing more.

And the floor of the Indian Ocean just about there was rich in metal hulks.

HARD AS it was on us, it was even harder on the animals. Josie was anxiously asking what was going on, the puppies were alternately demanding food and whining for their box, the seals in their pens were barking worriedly. The process of learning had gone both ways. While we were picking up Dog and Seal, they were picking up Human Intonations. They could tell we were upset and there is nothing in the world more likely to upset an animal that that knowledge.

"Quiet, quiet," pleaded Semyon in English and Dog and Seal. "You will drive me insane, you beasts." He pushed the puppies to the floor and called Josie to attend to them. "Dog," he said, but not to the animals; he was glowering at Winnington, silent against the hull of the whaleboat.

"Leave him alone," I said.

Semyon switched his glower to me. "Leave him alone, it is? But did he leave us alone? He sent us to the bottom, Logan! Filthy patchifist, he fired the guns!"

Winnington asked morosely: "From here?"

"Hah," said Semyon. "No, not you, but your brother patchifist, whoever he was. For peace you did it? Pig, how would it be for peace to make war?"

"For *ultimate* peace!" Winnington flared. "You think we *like* killing people, we peacemen? You're

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an idiot if you think that peace means sitting quiet and taking punishment." He was flushed and excited, taking a queer pleasure in the fact that we were all of us near death. "That is not pacifism, that's stupidity! We must *fight* for peace, we must *destroy* the enemy. Kill everybody who might kill us — then, only then, we'll have peace!"

We let him rant himself out while, very cautiously, we rocked the whaleboat free of the mud and crept quietly to the thermoplane. We were no longer getting sounds of battle in the audic apparatus. Either the battle was over or out of range—or it was perhaps fairly close, but masked by the interface between the bottom water and the warmer waters above.

The thermographs showed us when we breached the interface. I cut the drive, cut the ventilator switches, cut every motor that could give out a sound, and we listened as hard as we could. The little torp began instantly to settle, but we had plenty of water under us and the important thing was to be all ears, no sound, until we found out what was going on around us.

AS THE whaleboat lost forward speed the diving vanes ceased to bear us up and we slid downward, closer to the thermoplane we had just crossed. The autopilot began frantically manufacturing course corrections. It flipped the diving vanes and the rudders like a panicked barnyard hen, and when that produced no effect, it began to beep complainingly. I snapped its cut-off switch and it was silent again, and we listened.

Nothing.

Nina said: "Do you think we ought to try the sonars?"

I shook my head and started the motors as we sank under the thermoplane again. "No sense looking for trouble. If somebody's playing possum close by, they'll hear us on their audic, all right — but if we ping them, they won't even have to be close by." I locked in the autopilot. "Now what?" I asked.

We had a long debate over what to do next. But it could only be decided one way. There was a Caodai installation on Madagascar, little more than three hundred miles away. Our mission was to survey it; if necessary, to attempt to destroy it. We would carry out our mission.

Surprisingly, even Winnington agreed. "Very patriotic," he sneered. "But I'll go along. The sooner we wipe out those rats, the sooner the Peace Party can rule America."

"Very patriotic," Semyon agreed moodily. "Also quite wise,

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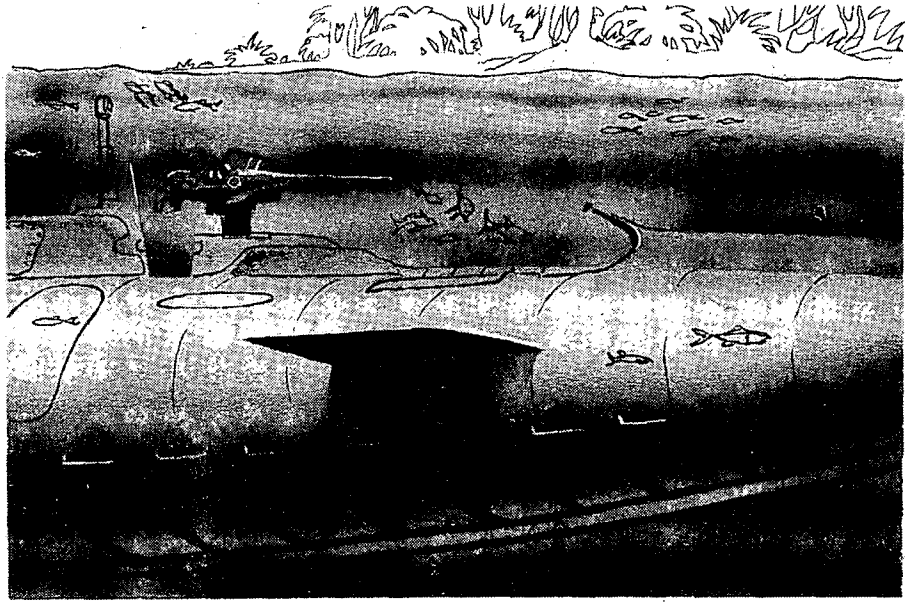

I think. Because — am I wrong, Logan? — we do not really have a choice; we are ten thousand miles from home. And this little boat they give us, its range is not more than a thousand."

Madagascar was only three hundred miles away — but the island was a thousand miles long. It was touch-and-go whether we would make it.

Semyon swore gloomily, coaxing the power reserves along. We crept on the bottom, taking our position from sonar soundings and one daring midnight surfacing for a star fix. We made it.

We hovered in a muddy little estuary while Semyon talked lengthily to one of the seals. Then we bribed the seal into the aft ejection tube. It wasn't necessary to blast him out with compressed air; he could swim free. He pilot-fished us up the little river as far as we dared go in the whaleboat, coming back to report and going forth to scout again. It was tedious but reasonably safe.

WE SENT Semyon and Josie out to scout; it was night and we were in a little cove, hidden by tangled growth. They were gone forever, and came back covered with mud.

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"Is a terrible place, Logan," Semyon groaned. "I thought we would be captured many times. But — it is there."

"Target Gamma?"

"One presumes so." He sighed. "There is a small town on this bank of the river. Perhaps two miles past it is a ring of labor camps. And in the center of the ring, something which is guarded. I did not myself see it, you understand, but Josie says it smells secret."

It was nearly dawn. Semyon was worn out, but Josie was as frisky as a puppy. She tended her brood while we were talking and demanded to be included in the party when we were through.

We left Semyon to watch over Winnington and the other animals. Nina, Josie and I made up the party that proposed to knock out the Caodai's secret-weapon base.

A girl, a dog and me. Struggling into her Madagascan coolie outfit — slacks, sweater, floppy hat — Nina saw my expression and laughed. "Cheer up, Moeller," she said. "There's only about five million Caodais on the island. Not bad odds."

I found myself grinning back at her. It was a queer thing — I couldn't help thinking about it, even with the approaching raid on my mind. Nina was an easy girl to get along with. It had been a long time since I had paid much attention to other girls. Why was it that now, with Elsie, comparatively speaking, almost within reach, I was suddenly noticing how sweet and — and charming, I had to confess it, another girl was?

It wasn't a line of speculation I really wanted to follow to its end. I was glad when we slipped out of the upper hatch and climbed ashore to get started.

"*ALTE-LA, ALTE-LA,*" grumbled the man in the yellow robe. *"Vous etes bien pressée?"*

"Idiot," Nina muttered to me

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in English. "I told you to take it easy." She smiled appealingly at the priest and spoke to him in rapid-fire French. I could make out only part of it: We were freshly arrived from Tananarive and looking for work; could he direct us to a rooming house?

The Caodai shook his head. Without much interest, he yawned and stretched and asked to see our passports. That presented a problem, because Nina didn't have one. Semyon and I had been issued the best set of forged credentials Naval Intelligence could cook up, but no one had planned for Nina to be along. However, Nina's French could get by and mine couldn't, so we were in trouble either way; we had decided to pass as man and wife and hope that one passport would do for both.

Nina kept up a clamor of questions and comments while the priest was looking over the yellow card that identified me as an agricultural worker of French origin. There were plenty of them on Madagascar, hangovers from the colonial days and the overthrow that followed. The priest had evidently been up all night and really just wanted to collect a toll for crossing the footbridge.

He tossed the document back at me and growled: *"Foutez le camp, touse les deux."* We paid him and moved along.

As soon as we were across the bridge into the town itself, Nina turned on me. "Moeller," she snapped, "if you can't relax, we'll never get through. Walk slowly! You've supposedly been walking a long way and you're tired. Hop like a grasshopper and you'll attract attention."

I transferred the cord tied to Josie's collar to my other hand. "Sure," I said. "What do we do, amble casually right through the town?"

"What else?" It was early morning, but already the streets were crowded. Most of the people moving about the narrow streets were Arab-African mixtures of one hue or another, but there was an admixture of Orientals and a handful of Europeans.

More than half of the Orientals wore the yellow robes, blouse or shorts of the Caodais. But they were not alone; several priests we passed were obviously nearly pure African. Caodaism, like the Mohammedans before them, practiced a rigid sort of tolerance; there was no distinction in skin color or creed for them — if the man whose skin was in question was willing to embrace the Caodai revelations and, if called up, join the Caodai armed forces.

And hundreds of millions throughout the Asian and African world had been more than willing.

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The streets were not only narrow; they wound like wormholes in an apple. I had to consult Josie's superior sense of direction — bending and talking to her under pretense of loosening her collar — to keep us heading straight through the town. She was almost the only leashed dog in sight and therefore attracted a little more attention than I liked; the Madagascan custom appeared to be to let dogs roam the streets, as unhampered and as privileged as a Benares bull.

Everyone, it appeared, spoke French. I remembered that the Caodais themselves had come from a section of the Indonesian peninsula once under French rule, and of course Madagascar had been French for nearly a century. All the same, it seemed odd to hear brown, black, tan and yellow faces conversing in the language I associated with bombed-out cities and finishing schools.

"SOFTLY," SAID Nina. "Keep your eyes on your lunch."

We were sitting beside the road as a company of Caodai infantry swung past. There was a sort of clearing in the vegetation, on the outskirts of the little town we had crossed; there were Oriental vendors of foods and we were not the only ones who had paused there for a bite to eat. The Caodai soldiers paid no attention to any of us, being disciplined, eyes-front troops.

They passed. Nina left me for a moment with the dog and talked briefly to one of the vendors. She came back with a handful of dried dates and two Coca-Colas and said:

"Security troops, I think. There are slave labor camps ahead. Does Josie recognize this road?"

I spoke to the dog; she growled back dubiously. "It smelled altogether different," I translated to for Nina, "but she thinks it's the same place. It has something to do with daytime smells and nighttime smells."

Nina nodded. "It checks. Labor camps beyond the bend in the road, something big on the other side of them. According to the Coke man, there's nothing to stop us going right along the road — all the Caodai installations are off to one side, on the bank of the river."

It was high noon, or nearly, and most of the other pedestrians were disappearing down side roads and into shops and cafes. Nina and I conferred briefly and followed their example. We struck out boldly down one of the little dirt paths toward the river, looking for a place to use as a base of operations. No one stopped us; no one paid any attention. I was expecting Caodai infantrymen to pounce out at us

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from behind every tree.

I must have shown it, because Nina snapped: "I told you, Logan, relax. Nobody's going to bother us."

She was right. After all, we were not a platoon of commando-ing Marines, anti-flash painted, tommygun-carrying, camouflage-helmeted. We were only a man and a woman and a dog; if I had seen a party like ours anywhere in the United States, I would scarcely have noticed it.

Except —

Come to think of it, I *would* have noticed such a party. I said curiously to Nina: "See anything unusual about these people? Civilians! Outside of the Caodai priests and the troops that marched by in the road — how many have you seen in uniform?"

She nodded thoughtfully. "A peculiar way to fight a war, I guess. You'd think they'd be as deep in this thing as we are, wouldn't you? Now look," she said, dismissing it, "how about holing up here and sending Josie in for a look?"

IT WAS a good enough place — on the shore of the river, where we might appear to be resting and enjoying the view if anyone should come along. I talked to Josie long enough to make sure she understood.

Josie was a patient dog, but she had very little comprehension of just what we humans were about, there on the banks of the Madagascan creek. She wasn't a stray mutt and she didn't want to act like one; she complained that she had been told many times that it was impolite and inexcusable to eat out of garbage piles or cans — and yet that was what we were asking her to do now, to justify her wanderings. She was a well-brought-up dog who had been taught to stay close to her home and master and—

I finally snarled loud enough to convince her; she rolled over on her back and I had to pat her stomach to let her know we were still friends. With the canine equivalent of a shrug, she started out.

Hours passed and she didn't come back.

"Dogs have no sense of time," I explained to Nina, possibly for the hundredth time.

She said reluctantly: "I know. I'm sorry if I'm pestering you. But I'm getting worried."

We had something to worry about, I agreed — but I didn't agree out loud. I was the junior member of our expedition, and though we had never articulated a command relationship, I was perfectly willing to treat Nina's "suggestions" as orders. Spying was her line of work, not mine.

But it was dark and we were

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in enemy territory and a good bet to be shot out of hand in case someone asked us questions. Our scout was overdue reporting back and Nina was getting worried. And without any fuss, our relative positions changed. We were no longer commander and jaygee; we were worried woman and — however falsely—reassuring man. I liked it much better that way.

"Stay here. I'll take a look around," said the man to the woman.

"The devil you will," said the commander to the jaygee. "Use your fat head for something, Logan. How do you expect to find the dog — whistle all the way from here to the Caodai installation?"

I said reasonably: "Of course not. I just want to take a look around—"

"No."

So that was that — for the time being.

BUT TIME passed and Josie stayed away; and what it came down to in the long run was the choice of which of us should go looking. And I won, if you can call it that.

Madagascar was an unfriendly place, after dark of a night. I could hear vehicles on the paved road, but I stayed off it. I could hear voices, now and again, around the houses that fronted on the river, but I gave them a wide berth. I felt uncomfortably like a fawn somehow forced to slink through Central Park from end to end, avoiding the worrisome human smell all about. Only I was more purposeful than a fawn, of course; closer perhaps to a beast of prey — a fox, say, trying to raid a henhouse.

And unaware (or all too frighteningly aware) that the henhouse was guarded by mastiffs.

I wasn't so much looking for the dog as trying to accomplish the dog's job. If Josie turned up where Nina waited in the clearing, good; Nina would hold her there until I returned. But if not, we couldn't stay there forever. It would then be my spied-out information we would go back to the whaleboat with, not Josie's. All I wanted was one clear look at the secret installation up ahead. Much more than that I couldn't hope for, but from whatever I could find out then, we could plan.

There were lights ahead. I was on the brink of the woods, facing a plowed-up open strip that surrounded a lighted, barbed-wire-enclosed compound — the prison camps, I supposed. There were Caodai guards emplaced about the fence, but not so close to me that I had to worry about them. Their attention would certainly be inward, toward the prisoners.

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But beyond the barbed wire, perhaps a quarter of a mile, there were two bright-lit yellow brick towers.

So far, so good. I skirted the edge of the plowed ground and headed for the lighted towers.

I was pretty lucky. I must have gone a hundred yards before they caught me.

XVI

"WESTERN SWINE!" hissed the Caodai. "Stay and brood on your crimes, Western swine!"

It didn't seem fair for him to call me that; he was as white as I. Fair-haired and chunky, he might have been of Dutch ancestry, but the Caodais didn't care about that.

He threw me into a cell and marched his detail away. I was in a yellow-walled room underneath the twin-towered building I had seen alight.

Logan, old boy, I told myself, you've had it.

Consider this fact:

I was out of uniform in Caodai territory — that made me a spy. It was well known what the Caodai did to spies.

There was only one bright spot:

Nina and Semyon were still free.

They knew I had been captured, so they would be careful. Would being careful be enough, though? I didn't know, but, on thinking it over, I decided it wouldn't, because there simply was no precaution they could take that would counterbalance their having to get inside the temple I was in.

I couldn't forget what the briefing officer had told us all, back on *Monmouth*: This expedition had to work, because the Caodais could not continue to be in possession of the secret of the Glotch.

"Western swine!"

My Dutch friend was at the door. He wasn't alone. A very dark Caodai, wearing a shoulder patch that looked like a rook in chess, brought in a case full of shiny things. Half a dozen other Caodais followed. Two of them grabbed me.

The dark one took a hypodermic needle out of the case.

"Wait a minute!" I said sharply. "You can't do this to me! I claim the protection of international law. You can execute me, but — *ow!*" He was mighty clumsy with that needle.

It tingled for a second and then my whole upper arm and shoulder began to feel cold. Well, I knew what was coming next. Subtle Oriental poisons, for a start. Then brainwashing. Torture.

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I said to myself: *Good-by, Elsie.* I was beginning to feel cold all over; the fair-skinned Caodai was standing over me, but he seemed far away.

He took out a pad of paper.

"Your name?" he demanded.

Name, rank and serial number. That was all, I reminded myself. I gave them to him as briskly and finally as I could: "Moeller, Logan, lieutenant junior grade, X-SaT-32880515."

"How did you get here?"

I stiffened; it was beginning. But he would never find out about *Monmouth* and the whaleboat from me. "I refuse to answer," I said distinctly.

IT TOOK an effort. The yellow walls were swirling around me now. I no longer felt cold; I hardly felt anything at all. I could barely hear the Dutch Caodai saying: "Where are your companions?"

Which one? Semyon was in the whaleboat, I supposed, but Nina —

I got a grip on myself. "No answer," I said.

I stared at him blearily, wondering what made a man like him turn renegade. Of course, when the Caodais overran the former Dutch colonies in the Indies, they had picked up everyone who would join them. In that respect, the Caodais were a perfect democracy. But still and all, a white renegade in Caodai uniform was hard to take.

"Atheistic Western swine!" hissed the Caodai. "Don't dare call *me* a renegade!"

Fantastic, I thought to myself drowsily. *It's almost as if I were speaking my thoughts aloud.*

I woke up with a jump. I had a sour, tinny taste in my mouth and an unbelievable headache.

Nina Willette was shaking me. "You cracked! Moeller, listen to me."

I blinked blearily at her. She said, with pity and reproach: "They worked you over, didn't they, Logan? But you shouldn't have cracked."

"Hey," I protested, "hold it!" I sat up and tried to set her straight. "I gave them my name and rank and serial number. That's all. I didn't crack!"

"No?" She looked at me and the pity was subtracted from her gaze, leaving only the reproach. "Then how did they know where I was?"

"Be reasonable, Nina. They must have —"

"How did they know *my* name?"

"Good God!" I whispered. "That needle. They must have shot me full of scopolamine."

"Exactly, atheistic Western swine," said the blond Caodai, opening the door. "Exactly."

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They were not gentle with us, but I hardly noticed. Truth serum! The psychic censors numbed, the questions answered — I must have spilled my guts for fair.

It was no comfort to reassure myself that it was not my fault, because it was a lie. It *was* my fault — my fault for allowing myself to be captured, my fault for being there in the first place.

We were led out of the cell, Nina Willette and I, and up into the main workings of the twin-towered temple. Target Gamma!

If only we had some way of getting back to America with what we were seeing now!

AND YET, coming out of my fog of self-reproach, looking about me against the faint, almost vanished chance that I might some day be able to get back and report, what would I have to say?

I could say: "We went through a long yellow corridor full of Caodais."

I could say: "They looked at us as though we were lepers."

But I couldn't say that I had learned the secret of the weapon called the Glotch, because there was no sign of anything like that anywhere around.

An arsenal? I had thought we might be headed for something like that, but this didn't look like an arsenal. It looked more like a hospital, or perhaps a medical laboratory, than anything else I had ever encountered, and that wasn't really a matter of looks but of smell, the faint under-layer of ether and iodoform you find in medical places. There were no whirring machines or hidden industrial plants, only the whispering air and medicinal odor and white-and-pastel look, in the little rooms we caught glimpses of.

And for this we had sacrificed *Monmouth.*

We reached a high-ceiling room where an old Caodai in a scarlet cloak stood frozen beside a bright globe.

"Votre saintete," said the blond-haired Caodai, *"les americains."*

Nina stiffened beside me. "The pope," she whispered, unbelieving.

It took me a moment to understand what she meant. Not the pontiff of Rome, no, but the supreme chief of the Caodais, who wore the same title. The old Caodai by the globe of the world was Nguyen Yat Hugo himself!

Remember what I had seen of old Nguyen: latrine posters, showing him luring helpless U.N. soldiery into haunts of bawdy vice, his yellow face wicked and fierce, his long fingers clawed like a killer cat's.

But he was only a man.

If he was evil, it did not show

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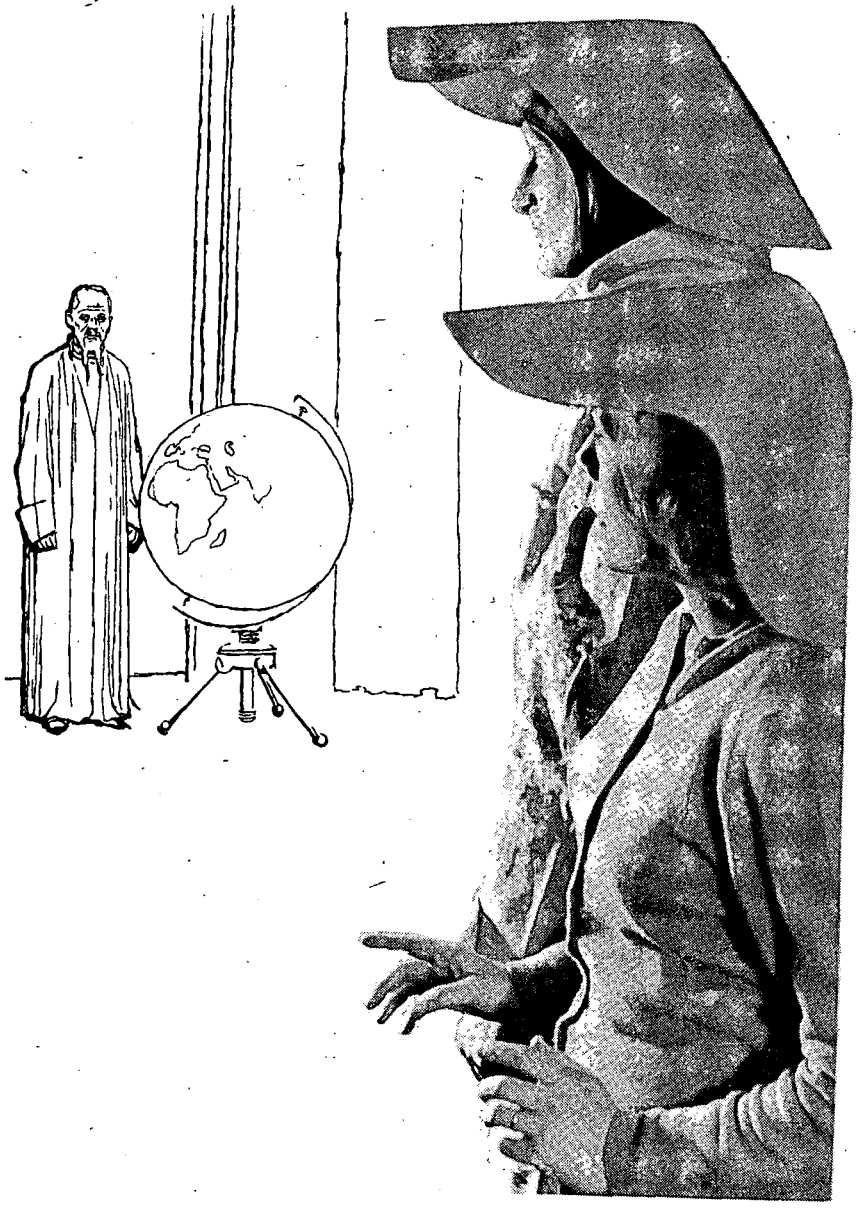

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in his face. He stood gravely watching us as we approached. He was tall for an Indo-Chinese, old but not senile, his robes curious but not ridiculous. I remembered the Caodais in their stockade north of Project Mako and their fantastic paper figurines of this man. It was hard not to think of him as a figure of fun (Mardi Gras masks and Jacks-in-the-box), but in his presence it wasn't hard at all.

"You slime!"

Not evil but anger. He spoke to us and he was raging. Nina, beside me, made a little choking sound.

He lashed into us verbally, cut us to ribbons. We were slime, wretches, unfit to live. We stood there and listened. What else could we do?

HE FINALLY rounded a period and stopped, his face as emotionless as before. He said something short and foreign to one of the Caodai priests — a middle-aged woman who looked like my mother's laundress — and we all waited while the priest left and then returned.

She brought another woman with her, a slight brown-haired woman in faded khaki. I stared at her curiously as she blinked in the light. It crossed my mind that she was no Caodai. She had the look of an American, though her dress might have been Caodai as much as anything else. She looked out of place here. I watched her, waiting for something to happen that would explain why she was here.

By and by, I noticed that the Caodais were very intently watching me.

And then I realized who the girl was.

Strange that I should see my long-lost wife and not at once recognize her?

I suppose so, but I wasn't the only one that had to do a double-take. Elsie herself didn't quiver a muscle until I suddenly yelled her name.

There was a dizzy, slippery, sliding moment when everything around me crashed into new arrangements and meanings and I stood still, like an idiot, saying her name and staring. And then I was running toward her and she toward me.

We shook hands.

It was more that than a lovers' hug — we stopped inches apart and I reached out my hands toward hers.

Perhaps the strain would have passed and we would have been in each other's arms, but the Caodai chief stopped us.

"Your wife," he said in a clear, savage voice. "Enjoy her for this moment, my lieutenant. She may not live to the next."

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I had dropped Elsie's hands, spun around and was halfway to him, in a single reflex, before the Caodai officers leaped between me and Nguyen, and their weapons were in their hands.

I said: "What the devil are you up to?"

"Up to?" he repeated bitterly. "No, Lieutenant, I want to know what *you* are up to. Perhaps we could have pieced out our information from your subconscious, where we found your wife's name and the story of your interesting voyage here. But it would have taken time, and I do not have time."

I TOOK A deep breath and the officers slowly holstered their guns. Nina was on one side of me and Elsie on the other.

I said: "What do you want?"

"Information! Truthful answers, Lieutenant — for which I will pay — with your life and your wife's."

I glanced at Elsie and Nina. Both of them were watching me, waiting for me to do something, waiting for my brilliant solution to an intolerable predicament. But there wasn't any solution in me.

I looked around at the Caodai officers, at the implacable face of Nguyen Yat Hugo. The thing was bitterly ironic: The Caodai was demanding information from me, information that could hardly be of any real importance to the Caodai cause (for what did I have to say, past the minutiae of our voyage?), but which I knew I would die to keep from him.

If our positions had changed — if it were I who had the secret of what they called the Glotch and he who had to learn it to live — then it might have made sense, both his insistence to learn and my willingness to die, and have Nina and Elsie die, rather than tell.

It didn't make sense. It was an outrageous perversion of human values for the three of us to suffer for the sake of concealing so little.

But that, as they say, was the way the little old ball bounced. I cleared my throat once and said to Nguyen Yat Hugo:

"Go to hell!"

Well, the heavens didn't fall on us just then, though I had thought they might. But I underestimated Nguyen.

All that happened was that he gave quick orders and the three of us were marched out — separately. And there I was in the yellow-walled room again.

I knew what it was, of course — the softening up that makes the ultimate tearing apart so much easier. Leave the Americans alone, Nguyen had said to his officers; put them away and let them worry for a while; let

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them scare themselves to death by brooding on what's going to happen to them.

But I didn't think it was going to work.

I sat there, staring at the yellow walls and wondering which of the footsteps in the corridor outside was going to be my torturer's, and I coded up all the factors and played them through the computer inside my skull.

Too bad that I had spilled Elsie's name and location in my drugged state so that Nguyen could have her flown here to torture me with. Too bad that Nina had been caught the same way. Too bad that no one could get word of what had happened to us to Semyon, back in the whaleboat.

Too bad. All of it too bad.

But those losses were already raked in and there was no point in wishing the little steel ball had dropped in a different slot.

IT WOULD have been better, I concluded, if I were in this all by myself, but since I wasn't, I would have to do the best I could with the circumstances I had to work with. Nguyen would roast in his Caodai hell before I would tell him a single syllable of what he wanted to know. Not because it mattered what I told him (for I knew nothing, of course), nor because I was a hero (for I knew from the trembling of my arms and legs I was not), but because that was the way the game was played.

And I wasn't going to get out alive, anyhow.

That was the important thing to remember: I was going to die. No matter what Nguyen said, I was a spy, trapped in a spy's role, and the best I could hope for was a quick firing squad.

Once I had thought of all of the possibilities, the computer that was my brain quickly rapped out my solution; it wasn't hard to see. Back at M.I.T., when I had learned computer operation and the mathematics that went with it, we had had a course in what they call Theory of Games. It hadn't kept me from dropping all of my loose change in each of the weekly poker nights, but it probably prolonged the process.

Roughly, it came to this: When things go well, play to win as much as you can; when things go poorly, play to lose as little.

This was no spot for maximizing gains. There was no prospect of any gain worth having. It was a spot for minimizing losses. I couldn't hope to get us all freely and successfully away. But I could hope that, perhaps, I would be the only one to die. If I did, Nina would have to stand by herself — but was she any better off with me alive? And Elsie, on the

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rial it, was nothing to Nguyen. She had no information; she had not been trapped in espionage. He might conceivably kill her out of pique — but not probably.

So the thing for me to do was to make the guards kill me right away.

On the principle of minimization of losses, I couldn't even try to grab a gun and shoot Nguyen. That was too risky — not to me, but to Elsie and Nina in case I was successful. What I had to have was a nice, quiet, futile attack on a humble, trigger-happy guard. End of Lieutenant Logan Moeller. As minimal a loss as anyone could imagine.

I made my plans and then I waited.

THEY CAME for me — I don't know after how long a time.

It was important that I do nothing premature. I didn't make the mistake of attacking them as soon as they poked their noses in the door — they might have just clobbered me with their fists and tied me to make sure I didn't try it again. I went along with them.

Though I know the Dutch Caodai addressed me in English, I paid no attention to their actions or manner. Down the corridor, into the elevator, out into the great hall. At the entrance to the hall, I decided, I would grab for a gun, point it at the handiest figure in a yellow robe and wait for the bullets.

We got to the entrance and the moment the door opened, I made my move. I got the gun — surprisingly, with no difficulty. I had thought that would be the hard part, but the guard's grip was incredibly lax. I had it and I leaped through the door and drew a bead on the female priest, the closest to me, standing morosely by the door. I could feel my shoulder-blades drawing close to each other, waiting for the bullets to strike.

Only —

No bullets.

I gaped around. There were the Caodai officers and there was Nguyen. And there, smoking a cigarette, swinging a gun in his free hand...

"Splendidly done, Logan!" said Semyon earnestly, throwing away the cigarette. "A brilliant maneuver. I should have known I would not be necessary. Is too bad you cannot capture these Orientals and deliver them to justice, is it not? But, you see, I have done so already."

XVIII

IT TOOK a while for it to sink in and I stood gaping in the meantime.

Semyon shrugged modestly. "A

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heroic feat, you say?" I hadn't said anything of the sort. "Oh, perhaps. But the credit should not merely be my own, Logan. Equally brave were the crew. We slipped up this filthy small river, every man at his post, searching out the Oriental target — "

I goggled. "What — "

"The *crew*," he said emphatically, "is brave also. Every *man* of them. No, no, Logan, I understand that you think of me as your rescuer, but without the six *men* in our crew out there in the river, *manning* the guns that will blow the roof off this very yellow brick building, what would my small gun accomplish?"

I caught on. I was surprised that Nguyen and his court didn't catch on, too, he made it so easy. But Semyon hurried on: "And we must not keep them waiting, Logan. If I do not appear outside within — " he consulted his watch — "eleven minutes, that is the end of all of us. Come, old man." He jerked his pistol at Nguyen. "Let us go to surrender."

Nguyen corrected coldly. "I agreed to talk. I do not surrender."

"As you wish it, old man. But come outside now, if you please. Perhaps my crew's watches are not accurate."

Well, we all went — Semyon and the pope and Nina and Elsie, fresh from their own cells and as astonished as I, and all. I was even more astonished, because there at the foot of the grass that went down to the little river rocked the whaleboat, looking tiny and ridiculous in the African sun; and as we came out, the muzzles of the deck guns, capable of launching high explosive shells that would blow us all to free ions in the air, swiveled to cover us.

I looked at them incredulously. Who were the gunners? And then I thought I understood. I whispered to Semyon: "Winnington?"

"Tied up," he whispered back. "Hush." Out loud, he said: "What is it to be, old man? Do we all die here and now? Or do we discover a solution that permits us all to go on living?"

Nguyen, staring sourly at the little whaleboat, said: "There is none. You cannot go free. But it was clever of you, Lieutenant, to have lied under our drug."

I said helpfully: "Oh, I wasn't."

"Enough! cried Semyon. "One thing at a time, if you please." He glared at me and said to the Caodai: "These are our terms. First, you give us safe-conduct out of the belligerent zone. Second, you come with us as a hostage. Third, you attempt no reprisals. Fourth — "

"Three will do," said the Caodai. "No."

Semyon blinked at him. "No?"

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NGUYEN AGAIN was the implacable, ageless figure I had first seen. He contemptuously ignored Semyon's gun, ignored the deck guns of the whaleboat, stepped close to Semyon and looked him in the eye. He said: "You shall not escape. You would not get so far as the mouth of the river."

Semyon retorted: "We'll blow you to bits."

"Do."

Semyon looked at me. "Logan?" he inquired weakly.

I cleared my throat. "Will you give us a safe-conduct, at least?"

"No."

"Will you — "

"Nothing, my lieutenant. If the Great Palace wishes my death at this time, I shall die; that is as the Great Palace wishes it."

I stared at him thoughtfully. He stared right back, not giving an inch. It wasn't bluff. Here was the pope of all the Caodais, the supreme ruler of half the Earth, the most deadly fighting man the world had ever made. And here were we, a handful of unimportant humans and a couple of dogs and seals, and he was willing to die rather than even give us his promise — which he could have broken without a moment's pang — to let us go free.

I shook my head silently. He never would have passed Game Theory at M.I.T., I thought, annoyed. Everything was with him; this was a time for him to be maximizing his gains, stretching out to conquer the world as it reeled under the Glotch.

I swallowed and stared harder. Maybe, the thought came from nowhere, maybe he might have passed the course, after all. Maybe it was not his technique that was wrong, but my estimate of the situation.

I contemplated the thought incredulously. Could it be, I asked myself, that things weren't going as well as they seemed for old Nguyen? It was ridiculous. And yet, as he stood there, he was no voracious conqueror; he was a sober, fierce old man, hopeless of moving forward, but inflexibly unwilling to retreat.

It didn't make sense.

IT WAS an impasse and we might have been there yet — if Semyon had ever been a Boy Scout. I don't know what they taught them at the Suvorov Academy, but I guarantee knot-tying was not in the curriculum, because while we were staring at each other, there was an interruption.

And the name of the interruption was Winnington.

It was Nina who saw him. "Logan!" she gasped. "We're in trouble!" The topside hatch of the whaleboat was open and Win-

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nington's surly face was sticking out.

We were all armed, of course, with guns we'd taken from the resentful Caodais and perhaps, if we'd been quicker, we could have potted Winnington before he got out of the hatch. But he had the jump on us. He was manning the deck guns from the breech position and it was too late; we couldn't shoot. If we had *looked* as through we were going to shoot, it would have been the last look on the faces of any of us. He cut out the switches to the remote fire-control stations below and stared at us, evidently deciding what to do.

A small brown pointed nose poked out of the hatch behind him. Josie. She looked worried, even at that distance, and I knew why. Semyon had left her to run the remotes on the deck guns, as she had so painstakingly learned back in the monitor at Project Mako, but his instructions had not included what to do in the event that a human captive got free. Naturally Josie was perplexed.

But not so perplexed and worried as I, because I knew what Winnington was likely to do. Peace? He'd do whatever came to hand for that ideal; he'd win peace even if he had to blow up the world to get it.

He bent to the loud-hailer and his amplified bellow nearly bowled us over. "Get out of the way!"

Semyon shouted furiously: "Turn that thing off! Get away from those guns, Winnington, I command you!"

"Hah!" roared Winnington, but he did turn the loud-hailer off. "I said get out of the way! I see who you've got there. Either you move or you go with him!"

And he put his thumbs on the gun-trips.

Semyon cried: "Wait! Wait, Winnington! Let us not be hasty! There is much to lose." But he seemed to have panicked; he was snapping his fingers erratically, babbling words that made little sense.

Winnington shouted angrily: "No stalling, Timayazev. I'll give you ten seconds to stand aside. Ten seconds, you hear me?"

"Please," begged Semyon, snapping his fingers frantically; I stared at him incredulously, wondering how far he had been pushed to dissolve so completely in terror. "Please, Winnington, I beg of you, do not fire!"

AND THEN I wasn't staring at Semyon at all, but at the deck of the whaleboat. Hesitantly, by fits and starts, looking bewilderedly at Semyon, Josie moved up behind Winnington. It was absolutely impossible, I told my-

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self, but she seemed to be following orders. But what orders? I glanced at Semyon. He was scarcely looking at the dog, only pleading with the pacifist and snapping his —

Snapping his fingers.

I remembered the cricket and the "little one-word language." And there, if you like, is a measure of comparative intelligence, for it was clear that Josie had remembered it before me. She closed her eyes and took a nip out of Winnington.

Reflexes are reflexes. Josie, yowling, was kicked yards away and into the water by Winnington's foot, but by the time he got his eyes around front again, it was a little too late. Semyon had been waiting; his gun was up. He fired and Winnington dropped.

"And now, old man," Semyon said to the pope, perfectly calm, "we resume our little talk, correct? I have saved your life from that patchifist; perhaps you will be more reasonable now?"

But Nguyen blazed: "Tricks, Russian! You have tricked me, I see, but it is not important. If I must die, I die gladly, for I have no wish to outlive the Great Palace. If the world cannot be Caodai, let me perish!"

There it was again! Even Semyon frowned.

Nguyen was roaring on: "Name your conditions! I refuse them all! Filth and slime, killers, vermin! You have us, but I spit on you!"

It was my turn to argue with Nguyen. But I didn't do it. There was a sudden queer flash, quick and gone.

Elsie put her hand on my arm. "What — what — " It had been like lightning, but there were no clouds; I couldn't understand it.

Semyon understood it, though. He understood it very well. He moaned something in Russian, his face gone suddenly sick. He nodded to me and said conversationally: "The clouds again, you see, Logan. Climbing trees on the horizon." That was silly, because I had just looked and there weren't any clouds.

There hadn't been any. But now there was one.

"Like Irkutsk once more," said Semyon, and gestured with his gun to the horizon. I looked, incredulous, as the mounting cloud leaped and spread, and then the concussion hit us from the distant nuclear blast.

XIX

WE NESTLED on the bottom, a mile off shore, and waited. Waited for what? Not for some miracle to put fuel in our tanks; there was no hope of that. Not for someone to rescue us; the U.N. would never come near Madagas-

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car and the Caodais would not rescue but kill. Not even for the world to come to an end. That had already begun. We just waited.

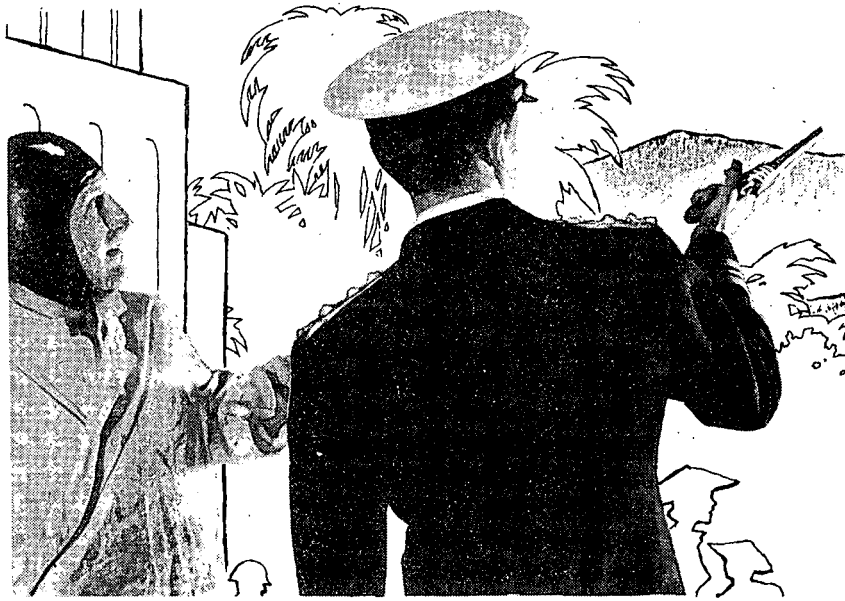
Semyon was comforting the animals; Elsie and Nina were sitting inspecting each other in silence.

We had taken a prisoner, old Nguyen himself, and he was bound where once we had bound the late pacifist Winnington. Too bad he was dead, I told myself — he would have been delighted with the way things were working out. Because his blind dream, the war to bring peace by destroying all warriors on Earth, was already started.

Nguyen said heavily from his corner: "Incredible." He was staring reflectively at Semyon and the dogs. "They are your animals; you use them as slaves. Some you kill and eat, do you not? The Caodai does not eat flesh; that seems horrible to us. And yet — they love you."

Semyon patted Josie. "We love them!" he said defiantly.

Nguyen shrugged. "It is well known that you love everyone and everything. It accounts for the satellite bombings as easily as for your slaughterhouses."



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"Shut up, old man!" said Semyon.

He crooned to the dogs while Elsie flared up.

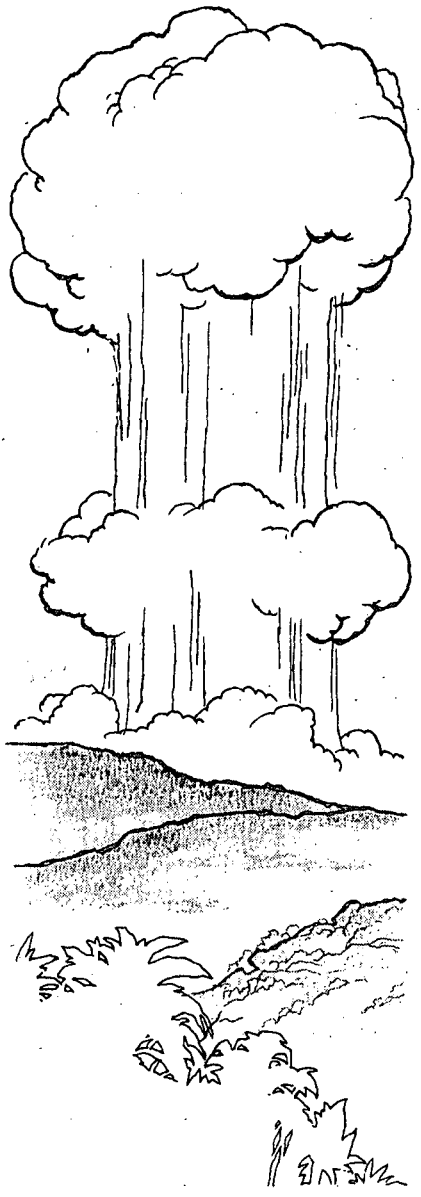
"Put a gag in his mouth. I'm sick of Caodai hypocrisy. The Western atheists do this and the Western atheists do that, and we molder away in their prison camps while they pretend that the fault's all ours. Gag him or I'll shut him up myself!"

I looked in some amazement at my warrior bride.

For I remembered Elsie. She was a quiet and biddable girl when we married — not counting her habit of volunteering, of course. I'd never heard her scream at anyone — at anyone at all, not even me. True, Nguyen was the arch-enemy and she must have had pitiful fantasies of a chance like this while she was in the concentration camp. But even so —

Not the least of the problems of the Big Cold War, I thought, would come when the Elsies and the Myselfs tried to get back to where we could recognize each other again.

Nina Merriam was collecting herself again. She was an Intelligence officer and she, too, had no doubt had ridiculous dreams of a chance like this. "Now then!" she said briskly to the pope of the Caodai. "Tell me what you were doing here."



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HE LOOKED at her calmly. "I *ask* you to tell me," she wheedled. "Please. There is no use to keep a secret, is there?" She offered him a cigarette and smiled, woman-to-man.

"An admirable performance," commented Nguyen. "I do not smoke, but your interrogation is splendid."

"Thank you. Why did you leave Cambodia for this lousy little island?"

He shrugged.

Nina smiled again. "Good. You stick to your principles. I don't suppose any of us will last twenty-four more hours, but we might as well go on with it, just as if it mattered whether you gave us information or I obtained it. So I shall continue to ask questions and you will answer only where it doesn't matter. Correct?"

Nguyen nodded wearily.

Semyon cut in: "You could at least tell us what is happening, old man. There is no secret about that."

Nguyen closed his eyes. "The end of the world is happening. Your ship attacked us in our own waters. We retaliated. Your people retailiated against our retaliation — "

"The satellite bombs?"

"You have seen one of them," said Nguyen Yat Hugo. "You must realize that our bombs are falling, too."

Nina whimpered: "But *why?* You must have known it was the end for all of us!"

Semyon raged: "Couldn't you wait, old man? Your weapon was too slow, was it? The burning and killing did not satisfy you, so you must unleash the satellite bombs."

Nguyen said hoarsely: *"Our* weapon? What weapon is that?"

"I do not know your name for it," Semyon retorted contemptuously. "We call it the Glotch; it is a burning fire that strikes the head and neck and — "

The stern, stiff old face of Nguyen was cracking. "No," he cut in, shaking his head.

It was incredible, but you couldn't doubt the expression on his face.

I stammered: "It — it isn't your weapon?"

"It is not," said Nguyen with passion. "We Caodai are on our knees before it!"

We stared at each other.

If it wasn't a Caodai weapon — and Elsie confirmed that it had struck them as hard as us—

And if it wasn't our own weapon, which it was not —

Whose weapon was it?

"TOO LATE, too late!" whispered Nguyen, looking through our periscopic sights. We had surfaced and the smoking coast of Madagascar was a mile or less away.

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"Maybe the damage is only local, I said. "Can you raise anyone on the radio, Nina?"

She shook her head. "Everybody's jamming."

"Fall-out negligible," Semyon reported from the aft lookout ports. "There must have been an onshore wind. One shouldn't swim too long in these waters, though."

I said to the pope of the Caodai: "If we find a spot on the coast where we can safely land, can you conduct us to a place where we can radio the U.N. forces?"

He spread his hands, his face unemotional. "I can try."

"We haven't any other choice, Logan," Elsie reminded me. I noticed that her hand was in mine. "Even if we could refuel this boat, we could scarcely navigate it back across the Atlantic."

"Man your stations," I ordered. "Nguyen, I assume you haven't any hailing signal we could use for a safe-conduct? It would be a help, if a Caodai ship should spot us."

"There is none."

"Full speed south then," I said. "As long as the fuel holds out."

It held out better than I had expected; we made nearly ten miles before the engines began to splutter. While we still had steerage way, I spun the rudder wheel and we slanted in on a sandy beach.

There were concrete pillboxes and chevaux-de-frise, and God knows how many electronic and sonar alarms we triggered as we beached. But there apparently were very few Caodais at the filter centers that day, after the bombs had fallen. Our only real danger — from that particular source, at least — was that someone would notice we had landed, on a radar remote, and send over a nike to home in on us to save the trouble of investigating.

We ran up from the beach, as far away as we could get before our breath gave out, in case a wandering patrol should happen by.

"There is," said the pope, "a command post somewhere about. I consecrated it myself two days ago."

We sent one of the monkeys up a tree, but she either couldn't understand what we wanted or her short simian vision didn't let her detect the building we had described. Semyon, cursing in Russian, tried climbing to see for himself. But we couldn't get high enough to see, any of us.

"It is this way," said Nguyen strongly, and what could we do but follow his lead?

And he led us right into a trap.

THERE WERE Coadais all over the place. They swarmed from the command post like ter-

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mites from a hill; there was a rattle of small-arms fire, and rushing brown-skinned men in uniforms, and it was all over before we could move. For a moment when they jumped us, I had old Nguyen in front of my gun and I don't know why I didn't pull the trigger.

"Treacherous beast!" sobbed Semyon. "We trusted you and you betrayed us!" And I felt much the same.

"No!" cried Nguyen, and he bellowed something at the Caodai soldiers. They gave him an argument. Apparently he wasn't recognized, but they took us all to the command post and there was a long, complicated discussion in French too fast for my ears. Nina, following it as closely as she could, explained:

"They think he's an impostor and the fat one is all for shooting the lot of us. Somebody's going to get a picture of the pope and compare."

They brought the picture — a ceremonial portrait draped in yellow bunting, as remote a likeness to the real man in its own prettifying way as the caricatures in our latrines had been in theirs.

But it convinced them. So all we had to do was arrange to use their radio, get in touch with the U.N. command in Washington, stop the war and clear up the mess.

We never got past Step One. Jamming—loud and furious, jamming by the Caodais and jamming by us. There were no radio communications anywhere in the world.

XX

NOT ONLY were we the ones who were trying to stop the war—it looked as though we had started it. For the naval action that *Monmouth* precipitated had spread. The Caodais had sunk her. A U.N. fleet had made a daring raid into interdicted waters to try to rescue her. In retaliation, the Caodais had raided the Caribbean again. In retaliation for that, a strike against Cebu. In retaliation for that—

It had wound up with the satellite bombs.

We looked at the situation map in the radio room and it was like the end of the world. There had been at least eighty fusion bombs dropped.

And a weary, jittery black radioman in a Caodai uniform was trying to get through with the message that might stop it all; but it was hopeless.

The radioman glanced at us and shrugged. "*Je m'y perds, votre saintete,*" he said. "*Je ne puis pas.*"

Nguyen said tonelessly: "He cannot get through."

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A *sous-tenente* who spoke fair English cleared his throat and said: "Sir, perhaps if we have patience, a time will come when we can get through. There have been breaks in the jamming; we received messages for nearly half an hour this morning."

"There will be no more breaks — except as the stations are bombed off the air." Nguyen smiled wryly. "It is that which we wish to prevent."

Semyon looked up from the animals. "Fantastic," he said, his eyes round. "It is not your weapon. It is not our weapon. Yet we bomb each other."

Nina Willette was still an Intelligence officer. She asked: "Have you really lost many people to this burning thing—I suppose I can't call it the Glotch any more."

Nguyen hesitated only a moment. Then he confessed: "More than seven hundred thousand. Nearly every one of our — what is your word? — our telepathists; and a few others. And you?"

It was Nina's turn to hesitate. Still, he had been frank with her, or had seemed to. "I have no official information. Perhaps half a million."

Half a million! Semyon and Elsie and I stared back and forth among ourselves. So many, I thought, how can there have been so many? But the more I thought, the more plausible it got. For even in my own small experience, there had been half a dozen or more.

Half a million — one out of every five hundred or so on the North American continent!

ELSIE, SURPRISINGLY, grinned unhappily, and in that moment, she was my Elsie again. She took my hand. "No more calling up your wife just to see how she is, Logan. It's too expensive now—if this thing knocks off the espers, they'll raise their rates. Is it always espers?"

"All," said Nguyen. "Nearly all professionals, plus a few others who had recently been sensitized. And with you?"

"I think so," said Nina. "You understand that it was a highly classified matter with us—but I think so."

"You see?" Elsie clutched my hand. "From now on, esping will be only on matters of the gravest importance—on matters—on—"

She stared at me, then wordlessly at the useless radio.

"On matters, she proclaims, of the gravest importance!" howled Semyon. "But naturally! They cannot jam the telepathic wave, however hard they try. It is our way to reach America!"

Our way to reach America.

But we didn't have an esper at hand to do it.

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Nguyen sent scouts racing across the Madgascan littoral in all directions and they came back with psychologists, with Caodai military communications men, with a mixed bag of assorted protesting black, brown and yellow men and women. But not an esper in the lot.

Nguyen snapped: "If you had not killed them off—" He sagged. "My apology. If they had not *died* through this thing we both wish to combat, it would be easy. But there is scarcely a telepathist in all the lands of the Great Palace. Hardly even a man who was sensitized, much less an expert."

Elsie looked at me and shook her head urgently. But all the same, I cleared my throat and said:

"I was sensitized only a few weeks ago."

"I was sensitized last year," Nina Willette volunteered suddenly.

No one else said anything at all.

Then Elsie burst out: "That's ridiculous, Logan! You're no esper; you only paid your money to *use* one. Good heavens, I was part of the same hookup, so if you—"

"I was sending," I told her. "You were only receiving."

"But, Logan, it's dangerous! You heard what this man said. It's bad enough in America, but in Caodai territory, esping is a quick way to die. Don't do it! Let that girl try!"

THEN SHE looked me in the eye and stopped. "I'm sorry, darling," she said defeatedly.

"I was sensitized more recently than Nina," I reminded her.

"I know," she answered, almost inaudibly.

"It, uh, it probably isn't really dangerous. I still have my helmet. I'll just take it off to see if I can reach some American esper. Then as soon as I've got through—"

She reached up and kissed me, hard. Then she turned away. "Get on with it," she said over her shoulder.

We talked to one of the psychologists Nuygen's patrols had rounded up, a faded tan-skinned man with a bulbous face and a thin black mustache, who claimed to know a little about the theory of ESP.

The *sous-tenente* translated: "You cannot reach anyone except a trained esper or one with whom you have had a—a—excuse, but what is the English word for 'rapport'?"

"Rapport. Get cracking," said Nina impatiently.

The *sous-tenente* pursed his lips. "Curious. Well, then, you must try to reach someone with

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whom you have formerly been in contact. Preferably an esper, if there is one. Think of him, and of the place where you saw him last, and of the sounds and smell of the room; recreate it all in your mind. But do not linger on a single person, for perhaps he is dead. Try one as best you can. If no answer, try another. You comprehend?"

"I comprehend," I said. "Let's go."

We took off our aluminum helmets — that I, for one, had lived in, slept in, even bathed with for weeks. We lay down on hard cots in a room of the command post and they closed the door.

And then we tried to telepath.

It was a funny sensation — something like trying to flex the fingers on a third hand. I was straining muscles that didn't exist, reaching through the void with limbs I did not own, shouting with vocal cords that should have been in the base of my skull and were not. In the hands of the esper, it had been quick and easy. There was the gray wandering and the sense of touching, and there was a contact.

Now—nothing.

WE LAY there like a pair of idiots. Could we ever reach anyone? Ridiculous, I thought. Could a jellyfish solve quadratic equations? The brain tissue, whatever it was that held the ESP-power, simply did not exist in us; we were not espers.

I belligerently followed directions, daring something to happen. I thought of Giordano and his office on the Venetian Causeway.

Nothing.

I thought of the smell of rotting palm trees and hibiscus, the warmth of the early summer Miami air, the way his breath had rasped as he was helping me reach Elsie.

Nothing.

All right, I said, I give up and thought of another esper, the incompetent one in Providence—

And I got Giordano.

Peevishly: *Who the hell are you? Don't you know this is dangerous?*

Not words, of course. I've explained that esping is not a matter of words. But an irritation, and a question, and a warning.

I tried—as a blind castaway might try to spot a sail on the horizon — I tried, ineptly and without knowing whether I was succeeding, to convey what I had to say: *The Glotch is not a Caodai weapon. It kills them as well as us. Tell the high command. Tell them to stop the bombs. The Caodai didn't start the war. They are dying as rapidly as we. Stop it, stop it, until we find out . . .*

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Until, finally, an incredulousness from Giordano, an understanding, at last a belief and a promise. I could almost see him, seated at his desk, not in Miami now but in some colder, dryer place, staring at emptiness, conversing with me. He was nodding, promising—

Bright yellow fireflies came between us.

I shook my head and the rapport was gone. No more Giordano, no more sense of touch.

But the fireflies were still there. They lanced through the base of my neck. I yelled out loud and clawed for the helmet I had dropped beside my cot. The pain was worse than that night along the drive at Miami Beach, worse than anything I had ever felt. I got the helmet and jammed it onto a head filled with hurting and flame.

"Help!" I bawled, and I wondered if the door was really opening, if people were really bursting in, if that was really Elsie clutching me in her arms.

My head rolled to one side and I caught a glimpse of the cot next to mine.

There was something there, something that had been a person, but it wasn't Nina Merriam —not with blackness and horror where the pretty young face had been, not with the charred agony that was crisped into the expression. Preposterous! It was a seared corpse. It couldn't be Nina Merriam!

But it was. So I found out—more than a week later, when they dared remove the needles, when they had stopped enough of the pain and patched enough of the ruin around my head and neck, and had begun to think I might yet live—the only man in all the world who had survived not a single attack of the whatever-it-was, but two.

AND ELSIE was there. We didn't talk for a while. And then we couldn't stop. The war was over; I had after all got through, and so had Nina—before she died. It was good that we both had made it, for they would scarcely have believed one. But you do not lie through ESP and two of us could hardly be mistaken.

So they had stopped the bombs and the satellites hung silent in the sky. And the Caodais and we had begun to compare notes and to look for answers. Volunteers had offered themselves as sacrifice. Some had died, sitting in darkened rooms with opened photographic shutters waiting to catch the track of whatever came flashing in as they esped, a few coughing their lungs out in improvised cloud chambers, a great many sur-

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rounded by infinite varieties of scientific equipment that tested and measured and felt.

After a day, I was well enough to walk about. The grafts from the skin bank were healing and the damage to the nervous system was slight. And I had a visitor. I was in a naval hospital outside of what had been New Washington and Nguyen had flown there to sign the Bethesda Compact. And he came to see me and to say: "Thank you."

That was the greatest shock of all. "For what?" I asked, blank.

Nguyen laughed silently. "We are in your debt, my lieutenant," he said. "We have learned to get along together, the Caodai and the West, and that is good. And even more, through your work with the dogs and monkeys and seals, we have learned to get along with our animals. And only just in time, my lieutenant. Only just in time."

"In time for what?"

"What you call the Glotch. It wasn't our weapon or yours. In fact, you see, it was not a weapon at all. Today the news is made: It is life."

"Life?"

He nodded somberly. "Living things. Telepathic. Tiny, below the threshold of visibility. They seek to communicate when they sense the subtle esper flow and because their structure and ours cannot exist together—they die. And perhaps that could be borne, but we die, too. As you know."

"Life!" I breathed. "How on Earth—"

"Ah, no!" he cried. "Not on Earth at all. Mars? I don't know —but not of the Earth, that is sure. And that is why we were only just in time. For now that we have learned to get along with each other, we start, this second, to learn to get along with Them. They have been attracted, the scientists think, by our esping and perhaps also our bombs from outside. I doubt They will ever leave us alone again."

"Mars!" I breathed. It was fantastic.

And also, of course, wrong — but how thoroughly wrong, we did not discover until Venus once more swam close to Earth.

Nina Merriam would have liked to know. I wished somehow I could tell her.

But I had Elsie to discuss it with. And, pretty soon, we had other things to talk about—discharge for both of us, a home, a job, a family — all the wonderfully prosaic things that help wipe out years of loneliness and horror.

But neither of us has forgotten Nina.

We don't want to and we won't.

— FREDERIK POHL

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(*Continued from page* 4)

Arthur was preparing to invade Korea, the attack was scornfully called "Operation Common Knowledge" because everything was known about it, including the target.

"Hah!" the Chinese must have said in top-level conference. "Very clumsy, trying to make us think we will strike at Inchon." So they dug in everywhere but at Inchon —and that, of course, was exactly where MacArthur landed.

This kind of disarmingly direct thinking was proposed for the problem of captured soldiers. By *ordering* them to broadcast or sign any "confession" demanded of them, all propaganda would have been denied the enemy. The proposal was defeated, but I'm not sure I see why.

Maybe because this approach is expected from young children only.

A father with a very large package joshed his son, who, wearing a Superman costume, was leaping all around the yard: "Come on, Superman, help me get this inside the house." The child sized up the bulk and heft of the package. "I'm not Superman," he said realistically. "I'm just a little boy and I can't carry anything like that."

Lincoln Steffens' *Autobiography* shows how flabbergasting literal thinking can be on an adult level. A Philadelphia political ring had five huge graft projects to put across. The lieutenants' opinion was to pull them separately, giving the public time to cool off in between. The big boss, however, decided to spring all five at once. They did—and such cosmic gall demoralized all opposition.

The devious minds contribute immensely, especially to the sciences, but mainly to provide the data that the rare Newtons and Einsteins — unswervingly literal, all of them—reduce to unbelievably simple equations, which the devious scoff at; nothing could be *that* simple.

The method is equally clear—find the most direct solution. Science fiction has done that often. Fifty years ago, Wells saw that the way to conquer gravity was to nullify it. (Verne scoffed.) Now there's an anti-gravity research program, while Verne's elaborate Moon cannon has long been obsolete.

Does that mean the literal mind is superior to the devious? No, they need each other.

It's just that the literal mind, traveling in a straight line, has to wait for the devious to catch up. It will.

It always has — so far, at least.

But if only they were tolerant of each other!

—H. L. GOLD

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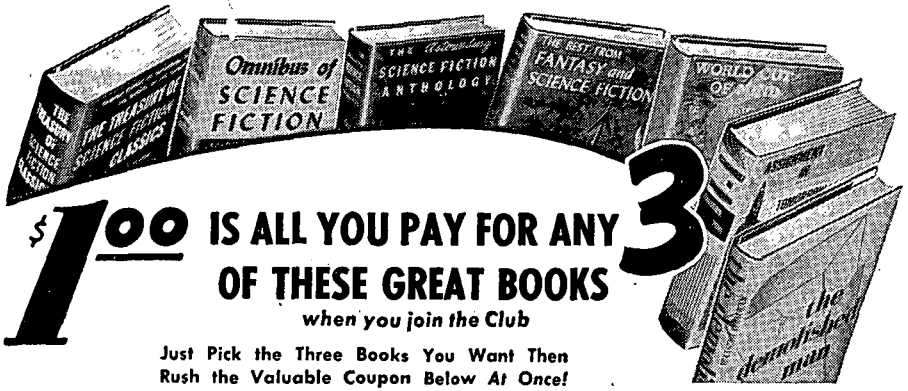
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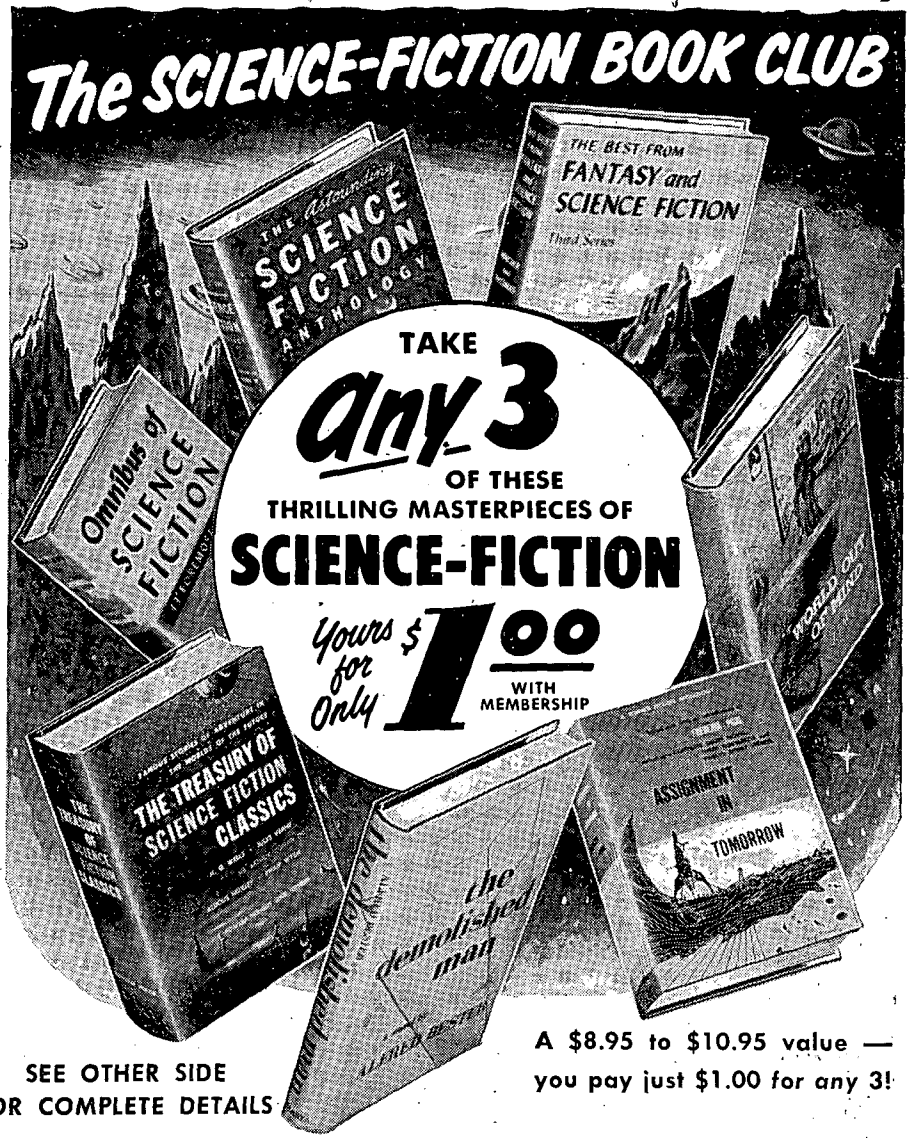
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